

Hemp Protein - Can This Whole-Food Protein Source Match Or Exceed The "Star-Power" of Whey?

By Nick Nilsson

Hemp protein is an up-and-coming protein supplement that I tested for 2 months as my ONLY protein supplement. Find out how hemp stacked up!

When you hear the word "hemp," generally the last thing that comes to mind is protein and bodybuilding. Without going into detail on the other "psychoactive" strains of hemp, it's time you learned more about what hemp can do for you from a nutritional point of view. I know I was very surprised to learn how complete a food hemp is!

I personally tested a hemp protein supplement for a period of 2 months, using NO other supplemental protein source. It was tough to give up the whey that had I been using for many years but, to give hemp a fair trial, I needed to be sure that the results wouldn't be affected by other supplemental protein sources.

So for 2 months, it was just hemp protein...

Now, hemp is one of the most versatile plants in the world - it can be used for anything from making clothes to fuel and even autoparts (all Mercedes/Chrysler models use hemp-composite side panels because they're more dent-resistant). For our purposes, we will focus entirely on its nutritional/protein content.

Hemp protein, while being a plant source, is actually a surprisingly complete protein. Hemp protein contains all 20 known amino acids including the 10 essential amino acids (8 in adults - 2 more are considered essential in children and seniors) our bodies cannot produce. Proteins are considered complete when they contain all 10 essential amino acids in a sufficient quantity and ratio to meet the body's needs.

Hemp also has an extremely good essential fatty acid profile - it contains the fatty acids in perfect balance to each other (Omega 3 and 6 Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs), in the near perfect ratio of 1:3 respectively).

One of the other major benefits of hemp protein supplementation is the very high insoluble fiber content of the powder. Fiber helps keep your blood sugar stable (ideal for fat loss), not to mention helping to keep you "regular." On the ingredient label, you'll see just how much fiber is in hemp...ALL the carb content is fiber, making it an excellent protein for low-carb diets.

So what does all this mean for you? Here are the main benefits of hemp protein supplementation that I discovered in my 2 month trial:

1. First and foremost - no loss of muscle mass or decline in muscle growth

One of the main things I worried about when switching to a plant-based protein would be loss of muscle mass. Could a plant protein really provide a complete protein and in substantial enough quantities to keep muscle AND help support muscle growth? The answer is "absolutely!" In using the hemp protein, muscle building was just as good, if not better, than with whey protein or protein blends. No problems at all there.

2. Excellent protein quality and usability

A better quality protein is more bioavailable in terms of digestibility and ability to be used in the body. When you're training with weights, you want a protein that is going to be well-absorbed and easily utilized by the body. Hemp fits the bill here. Being a "whole-food" supplement means it already contains many of the enzymes necessary for optimal digestion.

3. No protein-bloating

If you've ever taken a big protein shake (like whey or milk protein), you're most likely familiar with that "expanding" feeling that happens soon after. This does NOT happen with hemp protein. Whatever the reason, be it no milk-based ingredients or that it's a plant protein, taking hemp didn't cause any bloating at all.

4. No protein breath

Those who take milk-based proteins like whey or casein can definitely understand this one. Your mouth tastes and smells like rotten milk soon after you drink it. Hemp protein, however, doesn't leave a sour aftertaste. I know my wife was very appreciative of this fact and insisted I get more hemp protein based solely on that!

5. No unnecessary ingredients

The hemp protein product that I used in my test had only one single ingredient: hemp meal - no artificial sweeteners, flavors or anything not found in the hemp plant itself. To be honest, adding any other nutrients in would be totally unnecessary due to the nutritional completeness of the hemp. So if you're concerned about

getting artificial sweeteners in your protein powder (especially when on lower-carb diets), hemp is an excellent way to go.

6. High Fiber = Cleaner Insides

One of the least talked-about aspects of health is intestinal health. But it's EXTREMELY important to mention because a cleaner intestinal tract makes for improved nutrient absorption. The better you absorb nutrients from the foods you eat, the healthier overall you will be. Plus, the better your nutrient absorption, the more efficient your body will be both in fat loss and muscle building. The high amounts of insoluble fiber found in hemp protein really help keep your digestive tract moving along and functioning well.

These are the major benefits of hemp supplementation that I experienced during my 2 month test. What about downsides? There are a few, but in my experience, they were relatively minor compared to the major benefits of the hemp.

1. Taste

Because there are no other ingredients, what you see is what you get. It's a plant-based protein and if you take it straight, it's going to taste like a plant. If you're used to oversweetened protein powders, it's going to come as a bit of a shock to you.

To me, however, this natural taste was actually a very positive thing (I was getting a bit sick of those oversweet protein drinks). I quite enjoyed the nutty flavor of the hemp and would drink it straight with water. I also tried mixing it with orange juice and it tasted quite good. Bottom line: don't come in expecting a strawberry shortcake flavor when you drink it but if you like natural flavor, you'll love this.

2. Cost

Hemp protein is not a "bargain-basement, 10 pounds for 20 bucks" type of protein powder. It is relatively expensive because it must be processed carefully to maintain its high nutritional content (especially the Essential Fatty Acids). Being extremely fresh and containing no preservatives, it's also extremely oxidative, meaning it'll go bad much faster than regular protein. This is why it's generally sold only in 1 or 2 lb containers. Personally, I used 1 lb containers, each of which lasted me about 8 to 10 days (and I was taking it fairly frequently throughout the day).

But here's the upside...you don't need to use as much of it to get the benefits! Rather than slugging down 40 to 60 gram+ whey protein shakes, I found myself taking only 10 to 30 grams of hemp at a time (the higher dose was post-workout). The body processes it very efficiently and I found I did just fine on the relatively lower dose in terms of muscle maintenance and muscle building.

Overall, as far as cost goes, to me it was well worth the price.

3. Tidiness

This was a very minor drawback that I found - because the containers are small (1 lb) and the scoop has a long handle in order to reach the bottom, I found every time I pulled the scoop out of the container, I spilled a little powder on the counter. But if that's the worst thing that happens to you in a day, count your blessings. Like I said, it's a VERY minor thing.

Conclusion:

When I first decided to give the hemp protein a try, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. The information I read on it was very positive but I had always used whey or egg-based protein supplements. Would hemp do the job?

Hemp passed the test with flying colors. If you're looking for a high-quality protein that has the potential to really improve your health, I HIGHLY recommend hemp protein as an excellent addition to your supplement regimen.