# High-protein foods surge in popularity amid concerns over health impacts of ultra-processed options



The rise of high-protein foods has become a defining feature of contemporary dietary trends, influencing everything from snacks to staple meals. In supermarkets, options such as pancakes, pasta, and even desserts are now sporting bold claims of high protein content, appealing to a growing consumer base eager for convenience and health benefits. Recently, celebrity endorsements have added to this trend, exemplified by Khloe Kardashian’s launch of Khloud Protein Popcorn, which she touted as an ideal snack for those seeking both flavour and nutritional value. Meanwhile, Zac Efron has also promoted protein-rich porridge, illustrating that the protein craze has captured the attention not only of health enthusiasts but also of mainstream culture.

According to data from the research agency Mintel, protein claims are increasingly common, indicating a surge in consumer interest. In the first quarter of 2025, 8.3% of food product launches claimed to be high in protein, an increase from 6.1% in 2024 and 4.6% the previous year. Kiti Soininen, a Mintel research director, noted that the health halo surrounding protein has encouraged manufacturers to apply these labels not just to obvious sources like chicken and legumes but also to products less traditionally associated with health, such as mousses and pizzas.

Personal trainer Ethan Smith has raised concerns about the motivations behind this trend, suggesting that while high protein diets can aid muscle growth, utilising whole foods for protein intake is more beneficial than relying on processed snacks. He believes that the convenience factor of high-protein snacks is a double-edged sword, allowing busy consumers to opt for these products over whole, unprocessed foods. Official guidance stipulates that for a product to claim it is a source of protein, at least 12% of its energy value must derive from protein; to be labelled as high in protein, that figure increases to 20%. This has led some manufacturers to fortify their products with protein-dense ingredients, enabling them to meet regulatory standards.

Indeed, the protein snacks market is booming, with recent analysis revealing it reached a staggering $24 billion in sales, growing at three times the rate of the overall snacking category. With consumers reporting that they seek protein in 36% of snacking occasions, yet protein snacks comprising only 19% of retail sales, there remains ample opportunity for further innovation to meet this demand. The global high-protein snacks market, currently valued at approximately $21.4 billion, is expected to expand to $42.1 billion by 2034, driven by a growing appetite for healthy, convenient products.

Despite the enthusiasm surrounding high-protein diets, experts like Dr Paul Morgan urge caution. Many protein-rich foods on supermarket shelves are ultra-processed, which can undermine their purported health benefits. He warns that while consuming adequate protein is vital—averaging around 1.6g per kilogram of body weight for muscle building and about 1.2g for general health—an overreliance on processed snacks can lead to excess calorie intake, negating the desired outcomes. Dr Morgan compares the calorific value of some protein snacks to traditional products, noting that items such as Nature Valley’s protein bars can be comparably calorific to regular alternatives.

Moreover, the effects of a high-protein diet on long-term health are still under scrutiny. Some researchers are investigating the implications of consuming proteins from ultra-processed sources, amid concerns that such foods may carry hidden risks. As trends in health and nutrition evolve, the balance between convenience and quality remains a pertinent factor for consumers.

In conclusion, while the appeal of high-protein snacks and meals is undoubtedly growing, the discourse surrounding their health benefits remains nuanced. As consumers navigate their choices, informed decisions, with a focus on whole foods, may lead to a more sustainable and beneficial dietary approach over the long term.

### Reference Map

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Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cg419eglqv5o> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.chomps.com/pages/study-on-the-protein-snack-phenomenon> - A study by Chomps reveals that protein snacks have reached $24 billion in sales, growing at three times the rate of the overall snacking category. Despite this growth, protein-focused snacks account for only 19% of retail sales, indicating a significant opportunity for brands and retailers to meet the increasing consumer demand for protein-rich options. The study highlights a gap between consumer interest and product availability, emphasizing the need for innovation in the protein snack market.
* <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2025/03/03/3035663/0/en/Study-reveals-the-protein-snack-phenomenon-is-racing-through-the-126B-snacking-market-and-consumers-want-more.html> - Research from Chomps indicates that while consumers seek protein in 36% of snacking occasions, protein snacks currently make up only 19% of retail sales, leaving a significant market opportunity. Protein-forward snacks are growing three times faster than the overall snacking category, with protein snacks accounting for $24 billion. This suggests a lag in product innovation and highlights the need for brands to address the rising consumer demand for protein-rich snacks.
* <https://www.news.market.us/high-protein-snacks-market-news/> - The global high-protein snacks market, valued at $21.4 billion in 2024, is projected to grow to $42.1 billion by 2034, with a steady annual growth rate of 7.0%. This growth is driven by increasing demand for convenient and healthy snacks that fit into busy lifestyles. High-protein snacks are gaining popularity for their role in weight management and providing long-lasting energy, appealing to athletes and busy professionals alike.
* <https://www.fortunebusinessinsights.com/protein-snacks-market-110937> - The global protein snacks market was valued at $46.49 billion in 2023 and is projected to grow to $100.56 billion by 2032, exhibiting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9% during the forecast period. Asia Pacific dominated the market with a 43.17% share in 2023. Key players are investing heavily in R&D to develop innovative, healthy, and nutritious snacks to attract more consumers, allowing them to differentiate their products and stay ahead of the competition.
* <https://www.cozymeal.com/magazine/high-protein-snacks> - Cozymeal presents a list of 21 high-protein snacks for 2025, including options like chickpea cookie dough, hummus, black bean hummus, hard-boiled eggs, and pumpkin seeds. These snacks are highlighted for their nutritional benefits, offering a combination of protein, healthy fats, and other essential nutrients. The article emphasizes the importance of incorporating protein-rich snacks into one's diet to support energy levels and overall health.
* <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2024/3/1/2838546/0/en/Protein-Snacks-Market-to-Grow-at-CAGR-of-11-1-through-2033-Growing-Demand-for-Plant-Based-Diets-to-Propel-Growth.html> - The protein snacks market is experiencing significant growth, with projections estimating it will reach $11.1 billion by 2033, up from $4.8 billion in 2023. This expansion is driven by shifting consumer preferences toward healthier lifestyles and increased awareness of the importance of protein for overall health. The demand for protein snacks has surged, offering a wide selection of products to meet various dietary requirements and preferences.