

The 13 Cleanest Protein Bars on the Planet in 2020



Eating food without a barcode (AKA fresh and unprocessed food!) is always a great idea but when you are sprinting through an airport or hiking all over the universe to work or class, barcode-free foods are often scarce. Furthermore, when you're trying to assist with recovery, keep on track with training, or trying to achieve healthy weight gain, having clean and convenient food options between meals or on the run is crucial.

So my friends, today I will offer a quick review on some of the CLEANEST protein bars money can buy.

How to Find a Clean Protein Bar Label

First, before we dive into the good, I'd like to show you a brief example of the bad.

I often ask my athletes and executives to bring me labels of what they are eating so we can review the products together. I make this request because it is all too common for an individual to tell me “I found the best protein bar ever! It has ____ grams of protein and only ____ grams of sugar!!” And then when I finally see the product's ingredient list, I do my best not to mini-barf in my mouth, knowing that they are ingesting inflammatory toxins and other junk day in and day out. I remind myself to stay calm and then prepare to politely open their eyes to all they have been ingesting.

Here is a label that was brought to us recently:

INGREDIENTS: Coating (Maltitol, Fractionated Palm Kernel Oil, Whey Protein Concentrate, Cocoa [processed with alkali], Sugar, Natural Flavors, Calcium Carbonate, Salt, Soy Lecithin, Peanut Flour, Sucralose, Nonfat Dry Milk Solids, Yogurt Powder [Cultured Whey Protein Concentrate, Cultured Skim Milk], Peanut Butter [Peanuts]), Caramel Layer (Maltitol Syrup, Nonfat Dry Milk, Heavy Cream [Cream, Milk, Cellulose Gel, Milk Solids, Cellulose Gum], Water, Milk Protein Concentrate, Palm Kernel Oil, Butter, Disodium Phosphate, Caramel, Natural Flavor, Soy Lecithin, Carrageenan), Hydrolyzed Collagen, Protein Blend (Milk Protein Isolate, Whey Protein Isolate), Glycerin, Soy Crisps (Soy Protein Isolate, Tapioca Starch, Soy Lecithin, Salt), Natural Flavors, Caramel Flavored Chips (Sugar, Palm Kernel Oil/Palm Oil, Nonfat Dry Milk, Whole Milk Powder, Cocoa Powder, Soy Lecithin, Natural Flavors, Annatto Extract Color, Natural Vanilla Extract), Maltitol Syrup, Water, Canola Oil, Salt, Vitamin and Mineral Blend (Ascorbic Acid, d-Alpha Tocopheryl Acetate, Niacinamide, Calcium Carbonate, Zinc Oxide, Biotin, Copper Gluconate, d-Calcium Pantothenate, Potassium Iodide, Vitamin A Palmitate, Tricalcium Phosphate, Pyridoxine Hydrochloride, Thiamin Mononitrate, Riboflavin, Folic Acid, Cyanocobalamin), Sucralose, Soy Lecithin, Natural Almond Butter, Peanut Flour.

Contains milk, soy, peanut and tree nut (almond) ingredients.

Directions: Adults, for best results drink 8 fl. ounces of water or other liquid with this bar.

WARNING: This product contains sugar alcohols, which may cause gastrointestinal discomfort. Excessive consumption may have a laxative effect.

The absolute worst part about this label is the fact that it is one for a bar that is sold in just about every single grocery store in the U.S.

This company advertises most heavily to athletes looking to reach their daily protein goal, the busy executive, and the average Joe trying to curb cravings in order to achieve rapid weight loss. It is interesting that this bar is touted as a great snack to keep you energized, yet the vast majority of its ingredients are extremely inflammatory which will run you down.

Our goal is certainly not to sit here and bash a company, but we do want you as our beloved FWDfuel readers to be an educated consumer. We want to help you feel better each day but more importantly, to help you to prevent further health complications as you age. This is done best by keeping a close eye on what you put in your mouth. On a positive note, we are so glad this company was kind enough to let us know we may experience a laxative effect with excessive consumption.

I could sit here all day and dissect the label but since my goal is to highlight the best quality bars, I will just touch upon the most prominent red flags to scan for when reading the labels for prospective protein bars.

Red Flag #1: Carrageenan

Carrageenan is a thickening agent derived from seaweed. The research is unclear with mainstream food scientists with supported by the big food companies claiming it as OK and then international experts not having their pockets padded by the food companies stating we need to proceed with extreme caution with this food additive.

In examining the research, most studies performed on carrageenan used animals, others had small sample sizes, and no one has examined its effect on the microbiome environment or bacteria in the colon.

So, here are a few facts about carrageenan:

1. The International Agency for Research on Cancer which states that degraded carrageenan is “possibly carcinogenic in humans ”
2. Research performed in 2017 by a group of scientists in Israel stated, “Carrageenan may reduce protein and peptide bioaccessibility, disrupt normal epithelial function, promote intestinal inflammation, and consequently compromise consumer health.”

3. The Center for Science in the Public Interest lists carrageenan in its list of Chemical Cuisine food additives under the category of “caution”, well below the other categories of “Safe” and “Cut Back”.

While a few bites here and there would likely not cause a problem, carrageenan is a common additive found in everything from nut milks, to salad dressings, dairy products, snack bars and beyond, therefore, you must be extra careful as the amount consumed can add up in the blink of an eye. Even more, if you're an athlete battling leaky gut or an endurance athlete susceptible to gut issues, you will want to steer clear to this performance-robbing, brain-fog-inducing, food additive.

Red Flag #2: Sucralose

This artificial sweetener, commercially known as Splenda is not as “sweet” as we once thought. Sucralose is the chemical combination of sucrose and chlorine. Yes, that is correct, it is sucrose mixed with chlorine.

Sucralose is made by replacing 3 components of the sugar molecule with chlorine. So, each sucralose molecule consists of 3 atoms of chlorine.

Researchers have come to the conclusion that sucralose has the ability to greatly decrease the beneficial bacteria in our gut thereby changing the composition of our microbiome and enzymes.[5,6] The long term repercussions of this may include but are not limited to poor blood sugar and body weight control, inflammatory bowel disease, changes in mood and metabolism.

Interested in learning more interesting facts about artificial sweeteners? Check out our post [9 Artificial Sweetener Side Effects: Facts You Need to Know](#).

Red Flag #3: Maltitol

Unless your favorite pastime is experiencing bloating, gas, and diarrhea, I would not recommend consuming maltitol on a routine basis. Yes, it does have a lower caloric value and glycemic index than table sugar BUT maltitol is a sugar alcohol that our bodies do not fully digest. As a result, many individuals experience digestive discomfort with repeated consumption (think laxative).

Although it is completely possible to consume maltitol in small amounts without experiencing digestive distress, that unfortunately is not a common occurrence.

Red Flag #4: Processed Soy

Last but not least, there is an overwhelming amount of processed soy in this product. Now, before all my plant-based peeps throw their hands in the air with disgust, please be mindful of the fact that organic, unprocessed soy can be an awesome addition to your diet. High-quality soy is extremely nutrient-dense. I am only referring to the processed, “filler” soy laced throughout this product.

Is there strong research stating that processed soy is an issue? Nope, but I have coached several thousands of individuals and one major pattern I have noticed over the years is a reaction to processed soy.

The Cleanest Protein Bars on the Planet are...

#1 GoMacro MacroBars



Here we have it folks, the real M.V.P.! When you talk about the cleanest protein bar on the planet, it is hard to beat one with these certifications: USDA Organic, Certified GF, Non-GMO Project Verified, Kosher, Certified C.L.E.A.N., Certified R.A.W., and more. Adding to their impressive resume is the fact that GoMacro was started by a mother-daughter team and uses 100% renewable energy to fuel their production facility.

GoMacro MacroBars are made with 100% plant-based organic ingredients and free of gluten, dairy, and soy. Packing 10-11g of protein and 10-11g of fat per serving, these bars will keep your blood sugar stable and hunger at bay. Adding to the excitement is their introduction of new and exciting flavors such as Maple Sea Salt, Oatmeal Chocolate Chip, Apple Cinnamon, and Mocha Chocolate Chip. We recommend you try the GoMacro Variety Pack to figure out your favorite flavor.