

Protein is everywhere on restaurant menus now



Illustration: Annelise Capossela/Axios

Chains from [Dunkin'](#) to [Subway](#) are opening the year with protein-packed launches as the trend pushes deeper into everyday menus.

Why it matters: [Protein](#) is having a restaurant menu moment — and it's getting bigger. Now shorthand for "better-for-you" eating, it's reshaping menus as consumers dine out less, scrutinize value more and increasingly use [GLP-1 drugs](#).

- The push reflects growing consumer demand for high-protein menu options, fueled in part by drugs like Ozempic and Zepbound that encourage smaller, protein-forward meals.

Driving the news: Protein-heavy additions hitting restaurants this week include:

- Dunkin' adds Protein Milk to the menu Wednesday, allowing customers to add protein to coffees, lattes, matcha and Refreshers with 15 grams of protein in a medium. It also adds a line of Protein Refreshers and drinks.
- Blaze Pizza launches a limited-time "Protein-zza" Wednesday, a cauliflower-crust pizza topped with double chicken and marketed as GLP-1-friendly.
- Smoothie King debuts a 100-gram Protein Pack, a bundled offering designed to help customers reach a full day's protein target in one stop. It builds on the chain's earlier move as the first quick-service restaurant to launch a dedicated GLP-1 Support menu.

- Subway rolls out Protein Pockets Thursday, soft tortilla wraps with more than 20 grams of protein priced at \$3.99.
- Jack in the Box takes its Protein Bowls nationwide with the chicken bowls containing up to 35 grams of protein as part of a broader menu refresh.

Protein power growing

The big picture: This wave of launches reflects how [protein](#) has already moved from niche to normal.

- [Starbucks](#) added [protein lattes and protein cold foam](#) last fall, pushing protein into everyday coffee orders.
- Chipotle rolled out its [first-ever High Protein Menu](#) in December, explicitly tying items to the rise of [GLP-1 drugs](#) and calling out certain bowls, salads and snacks as "GLP-1 friendly."

State of play: Even chains built around "lighter" or wellness-forward positioning are redesigning menus around protein counts.

- [El Pollo Loco](#) is doubling chicken on its three new salads to push them past the 50-gram mark.
- [Playa Bowls](#) recently launched its first dedicated high-protein lineup, Protein Wave, with smoothies and bowls delivering 31 to 42 grams of protein.

Protein joins the value menu

Between the lines: This isn't just about nutrition. It's also about value, frequency and habit-building.

- Dunkin' is pairing its protein push with aggressive promotions and a \$5 Meal Deal, signaling protein is meant to drive repeat visits rather than sit behind a premium price wall.
- Subway's Protein Pockets make the same bet at \$3.99.

What they're saying: "Getting more protein in their diet is important to so many people. But all too often that protein is expensive or fried," Subway North America CMO Dave Skena said, adding that Protein Pockets are meant to make protein more accessible without sacrificing taste.