

FLEXIBLE DIETING QUICK START GUIDE



Flexible dieting is one of the simplest, most pleasurable ways to improve your body composition. Period.

When it comes to long-term progress, consistency plays a huge role. And whether you're trying to build muscle or lose fat, keeping your nutrition in check is key. Yet most guys never truly develop the habits necessary to make progress.

They usually obsess way too much over their training and put little thought into what they are eating. This leads to a lot of wasted time with little progress being made.

But, as with most aspects of fitness, learning the basics and applying them consistently is going to work better than anything else.

Calories Come First

To lose weight, you need to be taking in fewer calories than you are burning every day. The diet composition does not matter. You can be eating twinkies all day and still lose weight.

How to Calculate Caloric Intake, Step-by-Step

I don't recommend using most online calculators because I've found them to be inaccurate. For example, most of them calculate my maintenance calories at around 2000 per day where in reality I need about 3000.

Use this formula:

English BMR Formula

Women: $BMR = 655 + (4.35 \times \text{weight in pounds}) + (4.7 \times \text{height in inches}) - (4.7 \times \text{age in years})$

Men: $BMR = 66 + (6.23 \times \text{weight in pounds}) + (12.7 \times \text{height in inches}) - (6.8 \times \text{age in year})$

Metric BMR Formula

Women: $BMR = 655 + (9.6 \times \text{weight in kilos}) + (1.8 \times \text{height in cm}) - (4.7 \times \text{age in years})$

Men: $BMR = 66 + (13.7 \times \text{weight in kilos}) + (5 \times \text{height in cm}) - (6.8 \times \text{age in years})$

Credits: <http://www.bmi-calculator.net/bmr-calculator/bmr-formula.php>

Once you know your BMR, calculate it by one of the numbers from below based on your activity level:

Harris Benedict Formula

To determine your total daily calorie needs, multiply your BMR by the appropriate activity factor, as follows:

- If you are sedentary (little or no exercise) : Calorie-Calculation = BMR x 1.2
- If you are lightly active (light exercise/sports 1-3 days/week) : Calorie-Calculation = BMR x 1.375
- If you are moderately active (moderate exercise/sports 3-5 days/week) : Calorie-Calculation = BMR x 1.55
- If you are very active (hard exercise/sports 6-7 days a week) : Calorie-Calculation = BMR x 1.725
- If you are extra active (very hard exercise/sports & physical job or 2x training) : Calorie-Calculation = BMR x 1.9

Credits: <http://www.bmi-calculator.net/bmr-calculator/harris-benedict-equation/>

For Fat Loss:

Once you have your TDEE, or caloric needs to maintain your current weight, a good rule of thumb is to put a 500 calorie deficit to that number.

Why?

A pound of fat contains roughly 3500 calories. When you set a deficit of 500/day, that adds up to approximately 3500/week, which in theory should make you shed 1 pound of fat per week.

Of course, the human body is much more complicated, but calculating your caloric needs doesn't and shouldn't feel like rocket science.

Depending on your current level of leanness, you can adjust the deficit higher or lower to decrease the risk of muscle loss.

Follow these guidelines:

- 10-15% deficit if you're on the leaner side (below 15% body fat).
- 20-25% deficit if you have more fat to lose (above 15-20% body fat).
- 25%+ deficit if you're very overweight or obese. You can get away with losing fat faster without sacrificing muscle mass.

Examples:

- 10-15% deficit - say your TDEE is 2800 calories. $2800 * 0.15 = 420$. $2800 - 420 = 2380$ calories.
- 20-25% deficit - same TDEE. $2800 * 0.25 = 700$. $2800 - 700 = 2100$ calories.
- 25%+ deficit - same TDEE, 30% deficit. $2800 * 0.30 = 840$. $2800 - 840 = 1960$ calories.

For Muscle Growth:

To your TDEE value, add a small 150-200 calorie surplus.

Then, start tracking your body weight weekly averages and adjust as needed. Let's do an example calculation:

Say you've calculated your TDEE to be 3000 calories/day. This is the number of calories you eat to maintain your body weight.

Now, we'll add a 200 calorie surplus and end up with 3200 calories per day.

As you're tracking your caloric intake (and protein, at least), track your body weight in the morning, after going to the bathroom, at least 4 times per week (ideally - 7). Take the weekly average number and compare week to week.

Example #1:

Week 1 average: 186.4lbs./84.5kg.

Week 2 average: 187lbs./84.8kg.

Week 3 average: 186.8lbs./84.7kg.

Although the physical activity and caloric intake are going to be consistent, small fluctuations in weight are normal. In the above example, you would keep the calories at 3200 for another week or two and then decide if you'll increase them.

Example #2:

Week 1 average: 186.4lbs./84.5kg.

Week 2 average: 187.4lbs./85kg.

Week 3 average: 188.5lbs./85.5kg.

In this example, we can see that the speed of weight gain is more than we'd like. In this case, we scale back the caloric intake by 100/day for another two weeks and see what happens.

Example #3:

Week 1 average: 186.4lbs./84.5kg.

Week 2 average: 185.6lbs./84.1kg.

Week 3 average: 185.2lbs./84kg.

In this example, not only is the average weight not going up, it's actually going down. This most likely means that you've either lost some water weight or actual fat.

Whatever it is, bumping the caloric intake by 100/day is the way to go. Track your body weight at 3300 calories/day for two weeks and see how it changes.

This is the whole premise of a lean bulk:

Track -> Gaining weight and making progress in the gym? -> Keep things the same

Track -> Not gaining weight and stagnating in the gym? -> Bump calories a bit

Track -> Gaining weight too fast? -> Decrease calories a bit.

Macronutrient Composition Comes Second

You know your caloric needs, you've calculated the deficit, now it's time to split your calories between carbs, fats, and protein.

If you who don't know what "macros" are, they are the components that make up food.

Each macronutrient has a certain number of calories per gram. Protein and carbs have 4 calories, and fats have 9 calories per gram.

Protein

One gram per pound of body weight is enough to maximize its effects. If you weigh 180 pounds, aim for 180 grams of protein. Simple.

Same for you ladies. If you weigh 125 pounds, eat 125 grams of protein daily.

The only exception to this rule applies to very overweight or obese individuals. The rule above isn't set as a gram of protein per pound of weight. It is set as a gram of protein per pound of lean mass.

The problem here, for the average person, is that figuring out your lean mass can be difficult and time-consuming. For that reason, adhering to the 1g/lb of weight will be just as good for you.

But, getting back to my point on overweight and obese people:

This rule doesn't work well for people with lots of fat to lose because it's an overkill. Say an untrained guy weighs 270 pounds and is 30+% body fat.

This person wouldn't need 270 grams of protein per day. That would be too much. They would benefit much more from an intake of 0.6-0.7 grams of protein per pound of weight.

$270 * 0.6 = 162$ grams of protein. Much more achievable and just as effective.

Carbs and Fats... and Fiber

Splitting up your remaining calories between carbs and fats should be based on your personal taste, but there are two rules to keep in mind:

Get between 0.3 and 0.6 grams of fats per pound of body weight. If you weigh 180 pounds, aim for 54 to 108 grams of fat/day ($180 \times 0.3 = 54$, $180 \times 0.6 = 108$). At the very least, 15% of your calories.

If you're eating around 2700 calories per day, 15% is 405 calories ($2700 \times 0.15 = 405$), which is 45 grams of fat ($405 / 9 = 45$).

Finally, on to carbohydrates. Once you have your protein and fats numbers, calculating carb needs is pretty straight-forward:

Leave the rest of your calories for carbs.

Let me give you an example (warning: boring math ahead):

You're eating 2700 calories per day and weigh 180 pounds.

You'll need 180 grams of protein ($180 \times 4 = 720$ calories) and 54 to 108 grams of fats ($54 \times 9 = 486$ calories, $108 \times 9 = 972$ calories).

The remaining calories go to carbs. In our case:

$2700 - 720$ (protein calories) = 1980;

$1980 - 486$ (fat calories) = 1494 calories;

Now, split 1494 by 4 (number of calories per gram of carbs).

$1494 / 4 = 373$ grams of carbs;

Or, if you go with the high end of fats intake (0.6g/lb), the example would look like this:

$2700 - 720 = 1980$;

$1980 - 972 = 1008$;

$1008 / 4 = 252$ grams of carbs per day;

The higher your fat intake, the lower your carbs need to be and vice-versa. Don't stress too much about it. Get enough protein, eat within your range of fats and get the rest from carbs.

Also, aim for 10-15 grams of fiber for every 1000 calories you eat.

Fiber provides many health benefits and keeps you regular. Fiber also fills you up, which is especially important during fat loss periods.

Foods that are high in fiber are generally high in volume and low in calories.

This is awesome for dieting because you can satisfy your hunger with fewer than 200 calories. Think cucumbers, celery, cabbage, etc.

Food Choices for Flexible Dieting

Before we can get into food selection, I'd like to briefly explain why I don't like the term IIFYM (if it fits your macros):

The term IIFYM has this incorrect connotation and most people fall into the trap that "As long as I hit my macronutrient numbers, the foods don't matter."

While hitting your caloric numbers and macronutrients is very important, it's one side of a coin. Calorie quality matters.

IIFYM is one extreme, but there's another: "clean" eating.

Unlike IIFYM, where most people take it up as a challenge to shove as much junk down their throats as they can, clean eating is the opposite. With it, the goal is to eat only "clean" foods: veggies, lean meats, fish, dairy products, fruits, etc.

This is all well and good but it makes people develop this black and white, good and bad mentality towards food. Where a meal that consists of fish and veggies is "good", foods like chocolate and pizza are inherently "bad".

And these people are the ones who avoid the "bad" foods that they love because they think that pizza will go straight to their abs.

The solution?

Adopting a "flexible dieting" mindset.

But isn't flexible dieting another word for IIFYM?

No, and here's why:

Where IIFYM follows the rule of "hit your macros for the day, the foods don't matter", flexible dieting is different.

With flexible dieting, your goal is to hit your macros for the day but with a more balanced and “adult” approach to nutrition. With it, you get 80-90% of your calories from whole, nutritious foods and the rest are left for your treats.

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IIFYM Dieting

- ✓ Adequate caloric and macronutrient intake
- ✓ Balance between protein, carbs, and fats
- ✓ Includes mostly foods you like
- ✓ Meals are easy to prepare
- ✗ Meals make you feel full for longer
- ✗ Adequate vitamin and mineral intake
- ✗ Not relying on supplements to make up for lacking nutrition
- ✓ You don't have to plan meals in advance
- ✗ Fundamentally good for your health
- ✗ No energy crashes or afternoon fatigue
- ✗ Allows you to maintain a healthy relationship with food



Flexible Dieting

- Adequate caloric and macronutrient intake ✓
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- No energy crashes or afternoon fatigue ✓
- Allows you to maintain a healthy relationship with food ✓

How to Get Started With Flexible Dieting

I'm a bit old-fashioned and I love simplicity. My approach to flexible dieting is quite simple: I keep a regular notebook where I record my foods each day, I calculate my total caloric intake and I keep track of my protein.

I always make sure to include a protein source with my meals and snacks so I don't end up short at the end of the day. As long as I hit my caloric and protein goals, that's all that matters for me.

If you like this simplistic approach, here's what you need to do:

Step 1: Calculate your calorie and protein needs.

Use the BMR formula and TDEE calculator from above to get your starting calories. You'll probably need to adjust them a bit, since no formula on the planet is going to work perfectly for everyone.

For protein, adhere to the simple rule of 1 gram per pound of body weight. A bit more or less won't hurt.

Step 2: Get yourself a regular notebook.

This is where you'll be recording your foods each day. Start the day by writing the date (optional) and proceed with recording each meal. Once you've prepared a meal, calculate the calories and protein there.

Alternatively, you can also go for the MyFitnessPal app, plug in the food and get the calculations done for you.

Step 3: Buy a food scale and track your food

I'm all for eyeballing food, but unless you've got a few years of flexible dieting and weighing food behind your back, you won't be able to accurately predict how much food there is by looking at it.

Get yourself a simple kitchen scale and weigh the food before writing it down. You'll have to do some research about the nutritional value of various foods at first, but after a week or two, you'll know the values of the foods you eat regularly.

If you want to eat out from time to time, by all means, do it. But be mindful of portion sizes, salad dressings, fat on meat, added sugars, etc. All of these things can add hundreds of additional calories to your meal without you even noticing it.

And that's it.