**Your Diet for Your Goals**

As many already know; if you have a goal in health or fitness, whether it is to lose fat, gain mass or simply get fitter, increasing the amount that you train alone will not result in success. To truly reach your goals, you need to get your nutrition right as well. This article will focus on losing body fat and ‘toning up’, and the dietary alterations you may need to make. Notice this is all focused on you, the individual. Although there are some ‘rules’ to nutrition that can be applied to a population, it is ultimately different for every individual. That is, your diet needs to be made specific to your metabolism, likes, dislikes and preferences.

Daily Calorie Needs

So, you’re going to change your diet to help you reach your goals, where do you start? The first thing you need to do is work out how many calories you need to take in. Then you can work out exactly how many calories need to come from each macronutrient group (Carbohydrate, Protein and Fat). This gives you a platform to work from and base everything else to do with your nutrition from. It is easier than you think.

First get a value for your basal metabolic rate (BMR). This is the amount of calories you need to consume to maintain your body state if you were completely inactive. Also known as you base or maintenance level. There are various formulas and methods that can be used to estimate this value, however it is probably easiest to find this information using an online calculator, of which there are many. You then multiply this value based on how active you are, (this value varies from x1.2 for a sedentary individual up to x2.0 for an extremely active individual) this gives you a maintenance value for total daily requirement, that is the amount you need to eat to stay the weight you are. The value normally equals to roughly 35kcal/kg/day for the average, moderately active person. Using myself as an example: A moderately active male weighing 80kg.

BMR using online calculator = 1840kcal

Activity Level (x1.5): 1840x1.5 = 2800kcal per day (roughly)

You might be thinking this is quite a high value, so how accurate is it? Well, this is a rough figure and most people will overestimate their activity level and end up eating too much. So if you can, use a daily calorie calculator online, this will give you a more accurate value.

*Readjust for Your Goals:* Now you have a value for your daily calorie intake, you need to readjust for your goals. This is a very important step. You will need to decrease or increase your intake based on your goals. As this article is focused on nutrition for fat loss, we are going to decrease this value to lose mass. This will be calculated on a % of your maintenance level (this is preferred to a generic amount such as 500kcal/day as this will have different effects on people of different sizes, who need more/fewer calories per day). Generally you subtract between 10-20% from your maintenance total. It is good to start with a smaller reduction rather than a larger one so go with a 10% reduction to start with.

So continuing with the above example:

Total Daily Intake for Fat Loss: Maintenance Level – 10%

Therefore: 2800x0.9 = 2520kcal/day

Macronutrient Needs

Now that you have a value for your daily calorie intake specific to your needs, you can work out how many calories need to come from which food types. For this we will be calculating our macronutrient needs. This will be split into three macronutrient groups, that I’m sure you will have heard of, Protein, Fats and Carbohydrates. A few simple facts that will help you estimate these values: 1g of Protein = 4kcal, 1g of Carbohydrate = 4kcal and 1g of Fat = 9kcal.

There is some controversy regarding a lot of these values, again it is advised to source this information from either an online calculator or speak to a nutrition advisor. You can always speak to Sam @GBNutrition or Matt Swierzynski @Matt Swaz Personal Training and they’ll be happy to help you get this information right.

Protein: The general guidelines for protein intake are as follows:

If you know your body fat/lean mass then your minimum requirement is 1g per pound of lean bodyweight (1kg = 2.2lbs), and this value is then adjusted depending on your specific needs. This value will increase the more lean muscle you have and visa versa. Typically, most people find a higher protein intake better for satiety and blood sugar control.

So for my continuing example:

Body weight in pounds: 80x2.2 = 176lbs (body fat – 11%)

Lean weight in lbs: 176x0.89 = 156lbs

Minimum Protein requirement = 156g per day (=624kcal)

Fats: Your body needs fats for a plethora of reasons including healthy organs, systems and a healthy mind. Further to this, any training will benefit from a fat buffer in your diet, which acts to control free radical damage and inflammation. The generally guidelines for an average person states that minimum fat requirement in grams is equal to 1g per kg of bodyweight (0.5g per lbs total body weight).

For my example:

Fat Intake in Grams: 80g (720kcal)

Carbohydrates: The final macronutrient group and arguably the most important are carbohydrates. Your requirements are calculated by working out the left over calories from protein and fats. So your carbohydrate calories = your total calorie needs – (protein calories + fat calories). You can then divide this value by 4 to give you the amount of carbohydrate in grams you need to consume per day.

My example:

Carbohydrate Calories: 2520 – (624+720) = 1176kcal

Carbohydrate Grams: 1176/4 = 294g

So to summarise: Per day I need to consume 2510kcal, of which 624kcal needs to come from protein (156g), 720kcal needs to come from fats (80g) and 1166kcal needs to come from Carbohydrate (291.5 g).

Remember the values for protein and fats were based on minimum requirements and are likely to be increased due to the fact that we are trying to lose weight. A more realistic set of figures would be:

Total: 2510kcal, Protein: 170g (680kcal), Fats: 95g (855kcal), Carbohydrate: 243g (975kcal). Protein intake has increased to deal with muscle damage and repair from the training I will be doing. Fat intake has increased to aid as a fat buffer and to help with hunger pangs amongst other processes in your body.

Meal Frequency/Timing

Once you have calculated your total calorie and macronutrient needs, you are in a position to decide when you are going to eat them. Like most areas of physiology that relate to fat loss and weight maintenance, there is much debate as to when is best to consume you calories. It is however generally recognised as good for your metabolism if you spread your meals out over the day. Usually eating 4-6 meals and aiming to eat every 3 hours is ideal. This will act to increase your metabolism and decrease hunger pangs.

One demon that is incredibly hard to deal with when you are trying to lose body fat is the feeling of being hungry. The best way to deal with these feelings is to never have them in the first place. If you keep your protein and fat intake reasonably high, and spread you meals out to every 3 hours, this will suppress the feelings of hunger and allow you to eat comfortably throughout the day. The main thing is that you get the correct amount of calories from the correct macronutrients in your 24hour period. If you get this right, everything else will come easy.

Timing your food intake around your daily activity can also be an issue. A multitude of scientific studies has been carried out focusing on nutrient timing and there has been conclusive evidence as to when is best to consume which macronutrients. However, this information is not very applicable to real world situations, so, here are some guidelines as to when’s best to eat.

First of all, eat when you are hungry. You can snack. If you wanted your calorie intake throughout the day could be split up into 20 smaller meals. I am a big believer in the fact that everybody is different and that you should decide when you want to eat, as long as you are not eating over and above your daily needs.

It is a good idea to eat post workout. This will ensure you replace any sugars and salt you may have lost whilst training. It is also a time when many people feel hungry. It’s also advised to get a source of protein in post-workout if you’ve been doing intense weight lifting. This can be in the form of a sports supplement and for more information on these, visit us @GBNutrition.co.uk.

Don’t be fooled into not eating carbohydrates after a certain hour. If you have heard somebody say ‘you can’t eat carbs after 5pm’ then be assured this is rubbish. You can eat carbs whenever you want as long as you don’t eat over and above the amount you need in any one-day.

Finally, don’t have a nervous breakdown if you happen to eat over your daily amount on the odd day. Or if you know you’ve eaten too many fats and not enough protein. Putting this stress on yourself is not healthy. If you do it, just make sure you don’t the next day. You’re not suddenly going to put on 10 pounds because you got your daily calorie intake wrong for one day.

Counting Your Calories

Counting calories is a way of tracking how much you’ve eaten to ensure your eating appropriately for your needs. Calorie counting is not necessary each day so don’t become obsessed with reading every food label you ever come across. The best way is to count your calories for one day and eat roughly the same each day. If you know there has been a drastic change in your diet from this day then you can count again.

The golden rule of calorie counting is not to neglect. Tracking your calorie intake will be as accurate as you make it. If you neglect some foods, or leave some out it isn’t going to work. So yes, the sugar in your coffee does count, honey you put on your shredded wheat does count and so on…

When you look at calorie counting you are looking for TOTAL CALORIES (kcal), and the grams of Protein, Fats and Carbohydrate. This is how you will keep track of, and make sure you are getting the correct amount of calories from each macronutrient group.

Again there are numerous online sources that can help you with this process. In my opinion, <http://nutritiondata.self.com/> is the best source. It also has a tool for working out your BMR and your daily needs.

If you’d rather consult somebody in the know… speak to Sam@GBNutrition.

Adjust to Your Feedback

The reason you work out all these calculations, read all these nutrition labels and spend time mapping out when you are going to eat what is so you can get feedback, and then adjust accordingly. After you’ve been on your new diet for 2 weeks, you will be able to assess how you are doing. Have you lost weight? Have you lost fat? Do you feel healthy? Have you lost an inch? All these questions can be answered.

If your results are positive then keep on the same track, your obviously doing it right. If you not happy with the results then this information is just as valuable. You know you need to change something. So if you haven’t lost weight in those two weeks then readjust and reduce your calorie intake further to ensure you will in future weeks. You will be in a much better position knowing exactly how much you ate, what you ate and when you ate it, when assessing these results as you can pinpoint exactly what you think caused the lack of results and subsequently what to change. Don’t underestimate the importance of feedback. There’s not a professional athlete, cover model or health guru that doesn’t use it.

In Summary

* If your goal is to lose fat then you need to address the issue of nutrition. This is absolutely essential.
* Always work out you daily calorie intake (based on your BMR x Activity Level), and then work out how much of each macronutrient group you require.
* Try to space out your meals over the day (aim for at least 4). This way you will keep your metabolism busy and suppress the feelings of hunger.
* Eat when you are hungry and don’t listen the ‘no carbs after 5’ preachers.
* Count your calories and assess your feedback.

If you have a question specific to your own personal needs, then please don’t hesitate to get in contact.

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