

Level 2: Hitting Your Macros

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All calories are not created equal...

We've all heard that "a calorie is a calorie," and while there's truth in this statement, it can lead us away from our journey to build an incredible body.

You see, when we're just talking about mere weight gain, sure, it doesn't matter where these "calories" come from.

But...

When we're talking about improving body composition, however (*losing just body fat and not muscle, or maximizing muscle growth while minimizing fat storage*), we must not only follow the principles of energy balance, but we must do so with a proper balance of macronutrients.

A macronutrient is any of the nutritional components of the diet that are required in relatively large amounts: protein, carbohydrate, and fat.

How you balance your intake of these macronutrients has profound effects on how your body responds to the foods you eat.

For a very brief example: It is quite obvious that we need protein in our diets to build muscle. But actually not as much as you would think.

We also need carbs! Nowadays, the media sure has people believing that carbs are the enemy. But in reality, carbs are going to support our training efforts immensely, as well as support our mood, hormonal production, and many other bodily functions.

Fats are very important in our diets as well. First, it's important to mention that fats are more calorie dense. So this will make it easy for us to hit our surplus with more fat in our diets.

In addition, fats play a huge role in the production of testosterone! Yep, higher testosterone makes it a lot easier to pack on muscle.

The bottom line is, the right diet not only provides the proper amount of calories but breaks them down into the optimal amounts of macronutrients as well.

Hitting Your Macros In Your Calorie Surplus

Calories per gram of Macronutrients

- Protein: 4 calories per gram
- Carbs: 4 calories per gram
- Fat: 9 calories per gram

Now we're going to dive into how to properly set up your "macros" for maximum muscle gain and minimal fat gain.

Protein: 1g per pound of body weight

Fats: 20% to 25% of daily calories

Carbs: Make up the rest of your daily calories (*roughly 50% to 60%*)

Golden Plaza
The percentages are a good guideline, but I prefer to look at the exact grams per day.

How To Count Macros

We will use the same 140 pound male for example purposes.

Step 1.) Identify Your Calorie Surplus

$(140\text{lbs}) \times (17 \text{ calories per pound}) = 2,380 \text{ calories}$

Round up to 2,400.

This is your calorie surplus.

Step 2.) Find Protein Macros

1 gram per pound of bodyweight

140 pounds = 140 grams.

$(140 \text{ grams}) \times (4 \text{ calories per gram}) = 560 \text{ calories from protein.}$

End Result: 140 grams of protein

Step 3.) Find Fat Macros

20% of daily calories.

$(2400 \text{ total calories}) \times (.20) = 480 \text{ calories from fat.}$

$(480 \text{ fat calories}) / (9 \text{ calories per gram}) = 53.3 \text{ grams of fat.}$

End Result: 53 grams of fat

Step 4.) Find Carb Macros

Now that we have protein and fat macros, we need to see how many calories left will make up our carb macros.

Start by adding up the total protein and fat calories:

$(\text{Protein calories: } 560) + (\text{Fat Calories: } 480) = 1,040 \text{ total calories.}$

Next, subtract this from our total daily surplus:

$(\text{Total daily surplus: } 2,400) - (\text{Protein \& Fat calories: } 1,040) = 1,360 \text{ remaining calories}$

Finally, you can now find the amount of carbs in grams:

$(1,360 \text{ remaining calories}) / (4 \text{ calories per gram}) = 340$

End Result: 340 grams of carbs

Step 5.) Putting It All Together

Daily calorie surplus - 2,400

Which is made up of:

Protein ~ 140g

Fat ~ 53g

Carbs ~ 340g

Those are the amounts of protein, fats, and carbs to shoot for each day. So, when tracking your calories with an app or what have you (*I use My Fitness Pal*), you'll be able to see what types of food to eat to hit your macros (*which we are about to dive into the best foods to do so*).

To double check your results, you can work backwards and add up the total calories for each of your macros:

Protein: (140g) X (4 calories per gram) = 560 calories

Fat: (53g) X (9 calories per gram) = 477 calories

Carbs: (340g X 4 calories per gram) = 1,360 calories

(560 + 477 + 1,360) = 2,397 total calories

Pretty spot on.

Always remember, this calorie algorithm is just a means of giving you some guidance. **This is why you must be tracking your calories on a consistent basis to see if you're actually gaining muscle and strength or gaining too much fat - and adjusting as needed.**

You don't need to be super perfect either. Getting within the ballpark is all you need to do. And most of the time, I shoot for 50 calories or so over just to be safe.

If It Fits Your Macros (I.I.F.Y.M)

The IIFYM diet is a popular way to make your diet flexible and enjoyable based on your standards.

You can eat whatever you'd like as long as you hit your macros for the day.

Now, some view this as a free for all to eat junk food...

That's not the case here.

We need to give our bodies the most wholesome foods possible (*more on this in level 5*).

The idea here is to fill your daily calories with food to hit your set macros (*the ones you just calculated above*).

The reason for this diet structure is simple: to ensure we're getting the proper balance of protein, carbs, and fats.

Having a moderate amount of protein and fat with higher carbs creates the perfect storm for maximizing muscle growth while minimizing fat gain.

It's actually difficult for your body to convert carbs into fat. In fact, the process of turning carbs into body fat (*de novo lipogenesis*) is inefficient. About 25% of the energy is lost.

And fat is fat. It doesn't need to go through any extravagant process to be stored.

By keeping fat low and carbs high (*especially on training days*) we can ensure that the majority of our daily calories are being used for muscle growth.