## Calorie Needs and Macronutrients

The goal for competitive bodybuilders is to increase muscle mass in the bulking phase and reduce body fat in the cutting phase. Hence, you consume more calories in the bulking phase than in the cutting phase.

### How Many Calories Do You Need?

The easiest way to determine how many calories you need is to weigh yourself at least three times a week and record what you eat using a [calorie tracking app](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/5-best-calorie-counters).

If your weight stays the same, the daily number of calories you eat is your maintenance calories — in other words, you’re not losing or gaining weight, but maintaining it.

During your bulking phase, it’s recommended to increase your calorie intake by 15%. For example, if your maintenance calories are 3,000 per day, you should eat 3,450 calories per day (3,000 x 0.15 = 450) during your bulking phase ([6](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15107010)).

When transitioning from a bulking to a cutting phase, you would instead decrease your maintenance calories by 15%, meaning you would eat 2,550 calories per day instead of 3,450.

As you [gain weight](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/how-to-gain-weight) in the bulking phase or lose weight in the cutting phase, you will need to adjust your calorie intake at least monthly to account for changes in your weight.

Increase your calories as you gain weight in the bulking phase and decrease your calories as you lose weight in the cutting phase for continued progression.

During either phase, it’s recommended not to lose or gain more than 0.5–1% of your body weight per week. This ensures that you don’t lose too much muscle during the cutting phase or gain too much body fat during the bulking phase ([7](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24864135)).

### Macronutrient Ratio

Once you establish the number of calories you need, you can determine your [macronutrient ratio](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/best-macronutrient-ratio), which is the ratio between your protein, carbohydrate and fat intake.

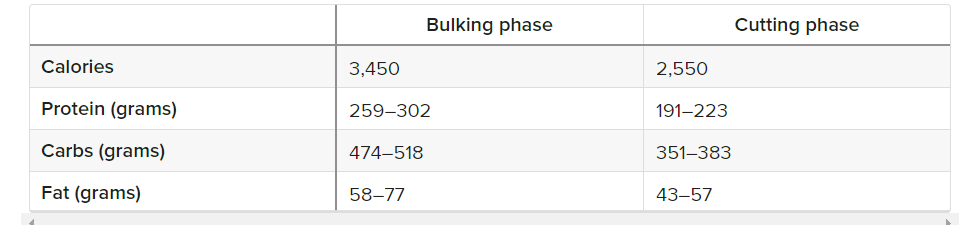
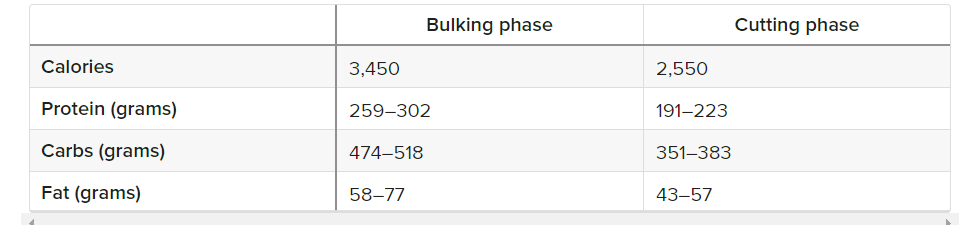
Unlike the difference in your calorie needs between the bulking and cutting phase, your macronutrient ratio does not change.

Protein and carbs contain four calories per gram, and fat contains nine.

It’s recommended that you get ([6](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15107010), [7](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24864135)):

* 30–35% of your calories from protein
* 55–60% of your calories from carbs
* 15–20% of your calories from fat

Here’s an example of the ratio for both a bulking and cutting phase:



### Foods to Focus On

The foods you eat don’t need to differ between the bulking and cutting phase — usually, it’s the amounts that do.

Foods to eat include ([7](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24864135)):

* **Meats, poultry and fish:**Sirloin steak, ground beef, pork tenderloin, venison, chicken breast, salmon, tilapia and cod.
* **Dairy:**Yogurt, cottage cheese, low-fat milk and cheese.
* **Grains:**Bread, cereal, crackers, oatmeal, [quinoa](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/11-proven-benefits-of-quinoa), popcorn and rice.
* **Fruits:** Oranges, apples, bananas, grapes, pears, peaches, watermelon and berries.
* **Starchy vegetables:**Potatoes, corn, green peas, green lima beans and [cassava](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/cassava).
* **Vegetables:**Broccoli, spinach, leafy salad greens, tomatoes, green beans, cucumber, zucchini, asparagus, peppers and mushrooms.
* **Seeds and nuts:** Almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds, [chia seeds](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/11-proven-health-benefits-of-chia-seeds) and flax seeds.
* **Beans and legumes:** Chickpeas, lentils, kidney beans, black beans and pinto beans.
* **Oils:**Olive oil, flaxseed oil and avocado oil.

### Foods to Limit

While you should include a variety of foods in your diet, there are some you should limit.

These include:

* **Alcohol:** [Alcohol](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/alcohol-good-or-bad) can negatively affect your ability to build muscle and lose fat, especially if you consume it in excess ([8](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3922864/)).
* **Added sugars:** These offer plenty of calories but few nutrients. Foods high in added sugars include candy, cookies, doughnuts, ice cream, cake and sugar-sweetened beverages, such as soda and [sports drinks](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/sports-drinks)([5](https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/resources/2015-2020_Dietary_Guidelines.pdf)).
* **Deep-fried foods:** These may promote inflammation and — when consumed in excess — disease. Examples include fried fish, french fries, onion rings, chicken strips and cheese curds ([9](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4034518/)).

In addition to limiting these, you may also want to avoid certain foods before going to the gym that can slow digestion and cause stomach upset during your workout.

These include:

* **High-fat foods:**High-fat meats, buttery foods and heavy sauces or creams.
* **High-fiber foods:**Beans and cruciferous vegetables like broccoli or cauliflower.
* **Carbonated beverages:**Sparkling water or diet soda.

### Bodybuilding Supplements

Many bodybuilders take dietary supplements, some of which are useful while others are not ([10](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29540367), [11](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5769537/)).

The best bodybuilding supplements include:

* **Whey protein:** Consuming whey protein powder is an easy and convenient way to increase your protein intake.
* **Creatine:** [Creatine](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/10-benefits-of-creatine) provides your muscles with the energy needed to perform an additional rep or two. While there are many brands of creatine, look for creatine monohydrate as it’s the most effective ([12](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28615996)).
* **Caffeine:** [Caffeine](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/caffeine-and-exercise) decreases fatigue and allows you to work harder. It’s found in pre-workout supplements, coffee or tea ([13](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2824625/)).

A multi-vitamin and mineral supplement may be helpful if you’re limiting your calorie intake in an effort to reduce body fat during your cutting phase.

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**Baseline recommended daily macros:** 2,500 calories, 218g carbs, 218g protein, 83g fat

**The daily meal plan for guys new to working out**

**• Meal 1:** Contains starchy carbs  
**• Meal 2:**Few carbs, if any  
**• Meal 3:**Few carbs, if any  
**• Meal 4:**Contains starchy carbs (post-workout nutrition)  
**• Meal 5:**Contains starchy carbs

**Sample meal options for beginners**

**Meal 1: Granola and scrambled eggs**  
– 1½ cups Greek yogurt  
– ½ cup raspberries (switch out for 5 sliced strawberries, ½ cup blueberries, 2/3 cup blackberries, or 1 tbsp raisins)  
– 1/3 cup [Vanilla Almond Crunch Bear Naked GranolaOpens a New Window.](https://www.bearnaked.com/en_US/products/bear-naked-granola-vanilla-almond-product.html) (switch out for 1/3 cup [Ezekiel Cinnamon Raisin cereal](http://www.foodforlife.com/product/cereals/ezekiel-49-cinnamon-raisin-whole-grain-cereal), 1/3 cup rolled oats, ¾ cup [Fiber One cerealOpens a New Window.](https://www.fiberone.com/" \t "_blank), or 2/3 cup [Kashi Organic Cinnamon HarvestOpens a New Window.](https://www.kashi.com/our-foods/cold-cereal/kashi-cinnamon-harvest-whole-wheat-biscuits" \t "_blank))  
– 3 omega-3 eggs

**Meal 2: Double chocolate cherry smoothie**  
– 2 scoops chocolate protein powder  
– ¼ cup coconut milk (switch out for 2 tbsp chopped walnuts)  
– ¾ cup dark pitted cherries (switch out for 1 cup blackberries)  
– 1 tbsp flaxseed meal (switch out for 1 tbsp chia seeds)  
– 1 tbsp cocoa powder  
– 3–4 ice cubes  
– 2–3 cups water

**Meal 3: Bibb lettuce burger**  
– 2 Boston bibb lettuce leaves (for “bun”)  
– 8oz 95% lean ground beef (switch out for 6oz salmon fillet, 8oz 95% lean ground turkey burger, 8oz chicken breast, or tuna burger (1 can tuna in water, drained + 1 omega-3 egg + 1 tbsp flaxseed meal + 1 tbsp Dijon mustard)  
– 2 slices tomato  
– 2 slices red onion  
– 1 tbsp ketchup  
– 1 tbsp canola mayonnaise (switch out for 1 slice provolone cheese,1 slice cheddar cheese, 3 tbsp mashed avocado, or 1 slice American cheese)  
– 3 cups green beans (switch out for 2 cups snow peas, 1½ cups peas and carrots, 1½ cups mixed vegetables, or ½ cup shelled edamame beans)

**Meal 4: Post-workout nutrition**  
– Recovery shake containing 50g carbs + 25g protein

**Meal 5: Grilled shrimp with spinach salad and brown rice**  
– 6oz shrimp (switch out for 7oz scallops, 7oz crabmeat, 6oz red snapper, or 5oz turkey breast)  
– ¼ cup brown rice, dry measure  
– 4 cups spinach (switch out for 7 roasted Brussels sprouts, 7 stalks roasted broccoli rabe, 4 cups shredded Napa cabbage, or 4 cups arugula)  
– ¼ cup crumbled Feta cheese (switch out for 1oz fresh mozzarella, 1oz cubed Havarti cheese, 1oz crumbled blue cheese, or 1oz goat cheese)  
– ½ red bell pepper, chopped  
– 2 tsp extra-virgin olive oil (switch out for 2 tsp toasted sesame seed oil, 2 tsp garlic-infused flaxseed oil, or 2 tsp avocado oil)