



# Flexible Dieting

## — Nutrition Strategy

The what, how and why of flexible dieting.

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# INTRODUCTION

## What is Flexible Dieting?

Flexible dieting is an evidence-based, adaptable nutrition strategy that allows individuals to reach their goals without extreme restrictions.

It prioritizes food flexibility with calorie control, making it a **sustainable and realistic approach to eating**.

Unlike traditional diets that label foods as “good” or “bad,” flexible dieting emphasizes balance—where whole, nutrient-dense foods form the foundation but **all foods can fit within your daily targets within reason**.

### Key Take-Away



Flexible dieting provides structure without rigidity, allowing individuals to maintain a healthy relationship with food while achieving results.

### Flexible Dieting



Sustainable – Eliminates extreme food rules that lead to yo-yo dieting.



Flexible Yet Structured – Encourages nutrient-dense choices while allowing room for personal preference.

### Traditional Dieting



Unsustainable – Hard to follow long-term.



Increased Cravings – Restricting certain foods can heighten desire for them.



Nutritional Gaps – Cutting out food groups can lead to deficiencies.



Poor Relationship with Food – Can encourage guilt, binge-eating cycles, and obsessive behaviors.

# CORE PRINCIPLES

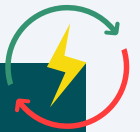
## The 4 Core Principles of Flexible Dieting

Flexible dieting operates on the principle that all foods can be included in a diet as long as they fit within an individual's caloric and macronutrient needs. This removes the psychological burden of strict food rules and helps individuals develop a healthy relationship with food.

**1**

### Energy Balance Matters Most

- Weight loss/gain is determined by calories in vs. calories out.
- Flexible dieting focuses on maintaining the right energy intake for your goals.

**2**

### Macronutrients Influence Body Composition

- Protein, carbohydrates, and fats should be strategically allocated.
- Flexible dieting tailors macro intake to fit individual needs.

**3**

### No Food is Off-Limits

- Instead of eliminating foods, flexible dieting allows all foods in moderation.
- 80–90% of intake should come from nutrient-dense foods, with 10–20% discretionary intake.

**4**

### Sustainability Over Perfection

- Adherence is the key to long-term success.
- Consistency > Perfection – Flexible dieting allows adjustments based on lifestyle, preferences, and goals.



# COMMON MYTHS

## Dispelling Common Myths About Flexible Dieting

Flexible dieting is often misunderstood, in part because its approach—allowing freedom and flexibility with food choices—can seem counterintuitive compared to traditional restrictive diets.

This has led to a variety of myths and misconceptions about what flexible dieting truly involves and whether it can deliver meaningful results.

### **Myth #1: Flexible Dieting = Eating Junk Food All Day**

While flexible dieting allows for all foods, nutrient-dense, whole foods should make up the majority of the diet to support overall health, performance, and satiety.



### **Myth #2: Flexible Dieting Doesn't Work for Fat Loss**

Flexible dieting is based on the scientific principle of energy balance. As long as caloric intake is appropriately adjusted, weight loss, maintenance, or muscle gain is achievable.



### **Myth #3: Tracking Food is Too Complicated**

Tracking intake is a skill that improves over time. Many users find that even temporary tracking leads to greater awareness and better eating habits in the long run.



# THE SCIENCE FUNDAMENTALS

## The Science Behind Flexible Dieting

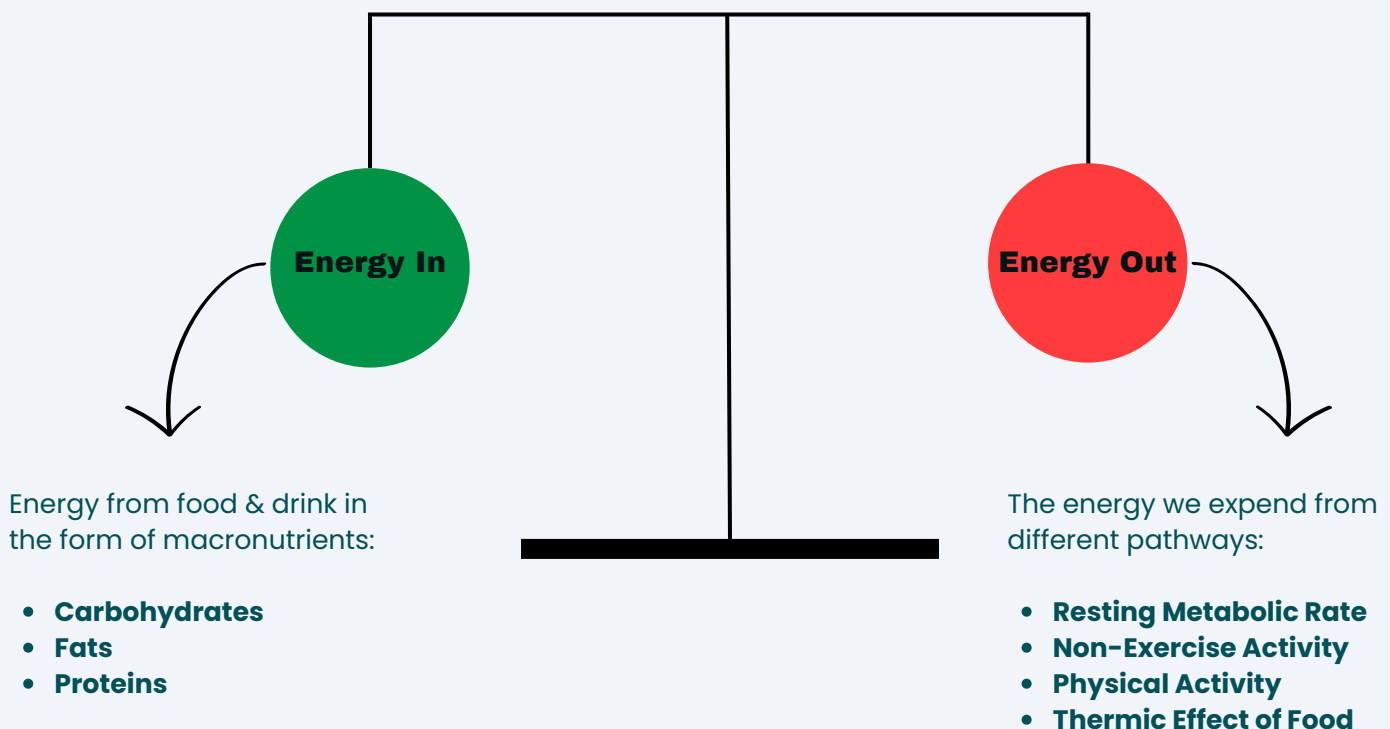
Understanding the scientific foundation of flexible dieting is key to appreciating why it's effective.

Unlike many fad diets, flexible dieting is firmly rooted in scientific principles such as energy balance, macronutrient management and nutritional psychology.

### Energy Balance: The Fundamental Principle

Energy balance is the cornerstone of any nutritional strategy aimed at changing body composition. Simply put, it's the relationship between the calories you consume (energy in) and the calories you burn (energy out).

When **in:out** are equal, our body weight **tends** to remain **stable**, this is termed calorie maintenance or energy balance.





# THE SCIENCE FUNDAMENTALS

## Deficit vs Surplus

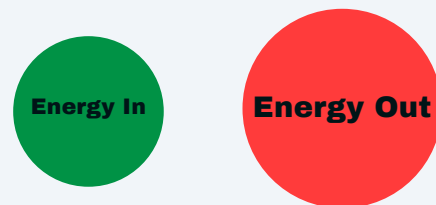
Understanding energy balance is essential if you're aiming to change your body composition—whether your goal is to lose body fat, maintain your current weight, or gain muscle mass.

Energy balance refers to the relationship between the calories you consume and the calories you burn.

### Calorie Deficit (Weight Loss)

A calorie deficit occurs when you consume fewer calories than your body burns each day. Your body taps into stored energy (primarily fat stores) to meet its energy demands, resulting in weight loss.

If your daily calorie needs are 2,500 kcal and you consume 2,000 kcal, you create a deficit of 500 kcal per day, leading to gradual fat loss.



### Calorie Surplus (Weight Gain)

Consuming more calories than your body expends creates a calorie surplus. This is essential if your primary goal is to build muscle or gain weight.

If your daily calorie needs are 2,500 kcal and you consume 3,000 kcal, the extra 500 kcal each day can help support muscle growth and body mass increase when paired with training.



# THE SCIENCE FUNDAMENTALS

## Understanding Macronutrients

Think of macronutrients as the big building blocks of food. Just like houses are made of bricks, wood, and glass, our food is made of three main parts: **carbohydrates**, **proteins**, and **fats**.

These are the big nutrients that give us most of our energy and help our bodies grow and stay healthy. **Water** is also a major macronutrient that is essential to life.

### The Macronutrients

#### Protein - 4 calories per gram of protein



Imagine tiny workers in your body fixing and building things. That's what proteins do & more. They're found in foods like meat, eggs, chicken, beans, nuts, & they help repair your muscles and make new cells.

#### Carbs - 4 calories per gram of carbs



These are your body's favorite fuel for exercise. When you eat foods like bread, pasta, or fruits, your body quickly breaks them down into energy that keeps you running, playing, and thinking.

#### Fats - 9 calories per gram of fat



Essential for hormone production, cell health, and nutrient absorption. They're in foods like oil and avocados. They contain more energy but our body is slower to use them during exercise.



# NUTRITIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

## Why Flexible Dieting Works

Understanding nutrition goes beyond just knowing what to eat—it's also about how we think about food. This is where flexible dieting truly shines, combining nutritional science with psychological well-being to help you reach your goals sustainably and enjoyably.

### The Problem with Rigid Dieting

Traditional dieting approaches categorize foods into strict groups of “allowed” or “forbidden”, creating an unhealthy, black-and-white mindset around food. While this might seem effective short-term, extensive research shows it can lead to:

#### Binge Eating

Severe restriction can cause increased cravings, leading to episodes of binge eating or overeating.

#### Stress and Guilt

Labeling certain foods as “bad” leads to guilt and negative emotions when these foods are consumed.

#### Reduced Adherence

Extreme food rules make diets difficult to sustain, leading to cycles of weight loss followed by regain.

### The Power of Flexible Dieting: Shifting Mindsets

Flexible dieting uses principles rooted in psychological flexibility, a scientifically validated approach to eating that supports a healthier and more sustainable relationship with food.

#### Removing Moral Judgments from Food Choices

Flexible dieting eliminates the binary categorization of foods into good or bad. Instead, all foods can fit into your diet as long as they align with your caloric and nutritional goals. When individuals adopt a flexible mindset, they experience reduced anxiety about eating and improved long-term adherence to dietary habits.

# NUTRITIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

## Why Flexible Dieting Works

Flexible dieting strategically includes room for foods traditionally viewed as “treats” or “indulgences.” Incorporating these foods can:

- ✓ Significantly reduce cravings and the psychological fixation on restricted foods.
- ✓ Prevent episodes of binge eating by removing the “forbidden” status of certain foods.
- ✓ Increase the likelihood of long-term dietary success by making the diet more sustainable and enjoyable.

## Encouraging Mindful Eating

Flexible dieting promotes mindfulness, a powerful tool for fostering a positive, intuitive relationship with food.

Mindful eating involves:

- ➡ Paying attention to hunger and fullness cues rather than external diet rules.
- ➡ Enjoying and savoring each meal without distraction, allowing your body to recognize fullness signals naturally.
- ➡ Understanding how different foods affect your mood, energy, and satiety, leading to more informed and balanced choices over time.

# MICRONUTRIENTS AND FIBER

## The Unsung Heroes of Successful Dieting

While flexible dieting primarily emphasizes the importance of calories and macronutrients (protein, carbohydrates, and fats), it's equally important not to overlook micronutrients and dietary fiber—the often-overlooked components that play a crucial role in health, performance, and overall well-being.

### The Role of Micronutrients

Micronutrients—vitamins and minerals—are nutrients required by your body in smaller quantities, but they have significant health effects.



Vitamins like B12 and minerals such as iron and magnesium help convert food into energy, supporting metabolism and performance.



Vitamins C and D, as well as minerals like zinc, strengthen your immune system and help prevent illness.



Calcium, vitamin D, and phosphorus are essential for strong bones, while magnesium and potassium play critical roles in muscle function.



Nutrients like omega-3 fatty acids, B-vitamins, and magnesium support brain health, mood stability, and cognitive function.

### The Role of Dietary Fiber

Dietary fiber is a form of carbohydrate found in plant-based foods. It's indigestible, meaning your body doesn't directly absorb or use it for energy. However, fiber provides essential health benefits and can significantly improve your flexible dieting experience.



Improved Digestion



Heart Health



Improved Satiety



Blood Sugar Regulation

# MICRONUTRIENTS AND FIBER

## The Unsung Heroes of Successful Dieting

Boosting your daily fiber intake is simpler than you might think. Here are ten practical tips that show exactly how much fiber you can add to your diet with simple additions and swaps.

### Top 10 Practical Tips for Increasing Fiber

1. **Add Chia Seeds:** Mix 1 tablespoon of chia seeds into yogurt or a smoothie to add an extra 5 grams of fiber.
2. **Snack on Berries:** A cup of fresh raspberries offers about 8 grams of fiber.
3. **Choose Whole Fruits:** Eating a medium-sized apple with the skin provides about 4 grams of fiber.
4. **Opt Whole Grains:** Swap white rice for brown rice or bread in your meals to add about 3.5 grams of fiber per cup.
5. **Snack on Almonds:** A small handful of almonds (about 23 nuts) gives you 3.5 grams of fiber.
6. **Add Lentils to Meals:** Half a cup of cooked lentils includes 7.8 grams of fiber, making it a hearty addition to any salad or soup.
7. **Use Avocado:** Adding one-quarter of an avocado to a sandwich or salad adds about 2.5 grams of fiber.
8. **Eat More Beans:** A half-cup of cooked black beans adds about 7.5 grams of fiber to your dishes.
9. **Vegetable Bonus:** Snack on carrot sticks or add them to your lunch for an extra 3.6 grams of fiber per cup.
10. **Drink Smoothies and Soups:** One of the simplest ways to massively boost fiber intake is to make smoothies and soups.

While the above are specific to certain foods, the same advice goes for other foods within the same food groups.

# HIERARCHY OF IMPORTANCE

Calories → Macros → Meal Timing

In nutrition science, not all dietary components hold equal importance. Understanding this hierarchy of nutritional importance allows you to prioritize effectively, maximizing results without unnecessary complexity.

## **Meal Timing – Important, But Less Critical**

Think of meal timing as the finishing touches to your nutritional house—it can improve results but only if your foundation (calories) and structure (macros) are already strong.

- Meal timing refers to when you consume your calories and macros throughout the day.
- While meal timing can enhance performance, recovery, and satiety, its overall effect is relatively minor compared to calories and macros.

## **Macronutrients - Second Most Important**

Think of macros as the structural framework of your nutritional house—they shape your body's composition and performance.

- After setting calorie targets, the next priority is distributing these calories across macronutrients based on your goals:
- Proper macronutrient balance helps optimize body composition and physical performance.

## **Calories (Energy Balance) – Most Important**

Think of calories as the foundation of your nutritional house; without the right foundation, nothing else you build will be stable.

- Managing calorie intake is critical for achieving your body composition goals, whether weight loss, maintenance, or gain.
- Regardless of what or when you eat, calories ultimately determine your weight trajectory.

# THE FLEXIBLE DIETING PLAN

## Step 1: Establishing a Goal

Flexible dieting isn't just about knowing principles—it's about practical application. In this section, you'll learn exactly how to create your own customized flexible dieting plan, designed specifically to achieve your individual goals.

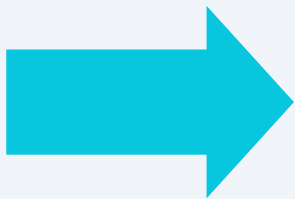
### Step 1: Establishing a Goal

Before setting up your flexible diet plan, you need clarity on your primary goal:



#### **Fat Loss - Calorie Deficit**

- Aim to lose body fat while preserving muscle.
- Requires consistently consuming fewer calories than your body expends.



#### **Maintenance - Calorie Balance**

- Aim to sustain your current body weight and composition.
- Consume calories equal to your daily energy expenditure.



#### **Maintenance - Calorie Balance**

- Aim to build muscle mass and strength.
- Requires consuming more calories than you burn, paired with resistance training.

Your goal influences every step that follows. Be clear, realistic, and specific about what you want to achieve.

# THE FLEXIBLE DIETING PLAN

## Step 2: Determining Caloric Needs

Once you've identified your goal, it's time to figure out your calorie needs. Here's a simplified, evidence-based approach to estimating your daily calories:

### Calculate Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR)



**MALE**

$BMR = 10 \times \text{weight (kg)} + 6.25 \times \text{height (cm)} - 5 \times \text{age (years)} + 5$



**FEMALE**

$BMR = 10 \times \text{weight (kg)} + 6.25 \times \text{height (cm)} - 5 \times \text{age (years)} - 161$

### Estimate Total Daily Energy Expenditure

Multiply your BMR by your activity level:

Sedentary (little/no exercise)	<b>X 1.2</b>
Lightly Active (1-3 days/week)	<b>X 1.375</b>
Moderately Active (3-5 days/week)	<b>X 1.55</b>
Very Active (6-7 days/week)	<b>X 1.725</b>
Extremely Active (athlete, intense)	<b>X 1.9</b>

### Adjust Calories Based on Goal

- Fat Loss: Subtract ~10–20% from your TDEE.
- Muscle Gain: Add ~10–15% to your TDEE.
- Maintenance: Keep calories roughly at your TDEE.



# THE FLEXIBLE DIETING PLAN

## Step 3: Setting Up Macronutrients

With your calorie goals set, distribute calories into macronutrients. The below uses an example of an 80kg male on a 2000 calorie diet.

### Protein - 4 calories per gram of protein



#### Recommended: 1.6–2.2 grams/kg body weight daily

Protein calories = grams of protein × 4 calories per gram.  
 $128-176 \times 4 = 512$  to  $704$  calories from protein.

### Fats - 9 calories per gram of fat



#### Typically set fats between 20–30% of total calories.

$20-30\%$  of  $2000 = 400-600$  calories /  $9 = 44.44-66.66$  grams of fat

### Carbs - 4 calories per gram of carbs



#### Fill the remaining calories with carbs

$2000 - 704 - 600 = 696$  calories /  $4 = 174$  grams of carbs  
 $2000 - 512 - 400 = 1088$  calories /  $4 = 272$  grams of carbs

## Recommended Macro Ranges by Goal

Goal	Protein	Fat	Carbs
Fat Loss	1.8-2.2	20-25%	Remaining
Muscle Gain	1.6-2.0	20-30%	Remaining
Maintenance	1.6-2.0	25-30%	Remaining

# THE FLEXIBLE DIETING PLAN

## Step 4: Balancing Food Choices

Flexible dieting encourages balanced, nutrient-rich choices while still allowing flexibility for personal preferences. Whole foods should account for 80 to 90% of your calorie intake with the remaining coming from discretionary calories.



### Practical Tip

If your daily calorie intake is 2000 kcal, allocate about 1600–1800 kcal from nutrient-rich foods and allow 200–400 kcal for your favorite discretionary foods.

# TRACKING PROGRESS

## How to Track Food Without Obsession

Accurately tracking and measuring progress is key to the success of flexible dieting. However, tracking should enhance your relationship with food, not complicate or strain it.

Food tracking is an excellent tool to build awareness and accountability, but it's important to approach it in a balanced way. Here's how to track without becoming overly fixated:

- ✓ You don't need to track every gram perfectly. Aim for consistency, not perfection.
- ✓ Focus on being roughly within your calorie and macro targets daily rather than exact numbers.
- ✓ Minor fluctuations in intake or body weight are normal. Look at weekly averages, not daily perfection.
- ✓ Notice hunger and fullness signals rather than relying solely on numbers.
- ✓ Consider occasional intuitive eating days to prevent burnout.
- ✓ Initially, use tracking to learn about portion sizes and nutritional content. Over time, you'll naturally improve your intuitive eating abilities.

Tracking is a short-term educational tool. The goal is to become skilled enough at portion control and mindful eating to eventually transition away from constant tracking.

# TRACKING PROGRESS

## Using Tracking Apps (Pros & Cons)

Food-tracking apps (such as MyFitnessPal, Loselt!, or Cronometer) are popular among flexible dieters. While useful, it's important to consider both advantages and potential drawbacks:

### Pros

**Awareness and Accuracy:**

Helps educate about the calorie and macronutrient content of foods.

**Flexibility and Adaptability:**

Allows you to easily adjust your nutrition goals based on your progress & needs.



**Accountability:** Regular logging increases awareness & encourages accountability.



**Ease of Use:** Most apps are user-friendly, & many foods can be quickly logged.

### Cons

**Can Encourage Obsession:**

May trigger anxiety or obsessive behaviors in some individuals.



**Accuracy Challenges:** Food databases can sometimes be inaccurate or inconsistent.



**Time-consuming for Beginners:** Initially, tracking can seem time-consuming, leading to early frustration if not simplified.

### Practical Tip

- Focus on tracking primary meals accurately; worry less about minor additions.
- Double-check entries occasionally (app databases sometimes have errors).
- Create and save custom meals for foods you eat regularly, speeding up tracking.
- Use barcode scanning features for convenience.

# MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

## When & How to Adjust Your Calories and Macros

Tracking your food and progress effectively helps you understand when it's time to make adjustments:

- 1** Weight loss stalls: If fat loss plateaus for more than 2–3 weeks.
- 2** Muscle gain plateaus: If progress in lean muscle mass or strength has stopped.
- 3** Performance decreases: If energy levels consistently drop or recovery slows significantly.

### Practical Tip

How to make an adjustment

- Calorie Adjustments: Small increments or decreases (5–10% at a time) are usually sufficient.
- Prioritize maintaining protein levels for satiety and muscle retention.
- Adjust carbohydrates up or down to manage energy levels and performance.
- Fine-tune fats based on hunger cues and energy sustainability.

**Example:** If fat loss stalls, reduce calories slightly by ~150–250 kcal/day or add an extra weekly cardio session, reassessing after 1–2 weeks.

# SUSTAINABILITY

## Sustainable Eating Habits for Life

Flexible dieting isn't just a short-term fix—it's a lifelong strategy for maintaining a healthy body and a positive relationship with food.

### Managing Your Diet During Social Events & Travel

Social events, travel, or celebrations don't need to derail your progress. The true strength of flexible dieting lies in its adaptability to real-life situations:



**Plan Ahead:** If you know you'll indulge at a special event, slightly reduce calorie intake earlier in the day or the day before.



**Portion Awareness:** Focus on portion control rather than avoiding specific foods altogether. Aim for balanced plates over perfection.



**Prioritize Protein:** Eating protein-rich foods early in the day can help you manage hunger and make balanced choices later.



**Stay Active:** If traveling, include physical activity such as walking or short workouts to maintain energy balance and feel good.

# SUSTAINABILITY

## Sustainable Eating Habits for Life

Flexible dieting isn't just a short-term fix—it's a lifelong strategy for maintaining a healthy body and a positive relationship with food.

### Mindful Eating: Tuning into Your Body's Cues

Mindful eating means paying attention to your body's natural hunger and fullness signals, rather than just calorie counting or external rules. Developing mindful eating skills supports long-term adherence and prevents disordered eating behaviors.

- ✔ **Slow Down:** Eat meals slowly and without distractions (like TV or phones), allowing your body to recognize fullness cues naturally.
- ✔ **Check-In With Yourself:** Regularly pause during meals to assess your hunger and fullness levels. Ask yourself, "Am I satisfied yet?"
- ✔ **Savor Your Food:** Enjoy each bite intentionally. Appreciate taste, texture, and smell to foster satisfaction and reduce cravings.
- ✔ **Identify Hunger vs. Cravings:** Recognize true hunger cues vs. emotional or boredom eating.



# SUSTAINABILITY

## Sustainable Eating Habits for Life

Flexible dieting isn't just a short-term fix—it's a lifelong strategy for maintaining a healthy body and a positive relationship with food.

### Managing Cravings Without Guilt

Flexible dieting naturally reduces cravings by permitting all foods in moderation. Removing restrictive labels on food dramatically decreases psychological fixation and feelings of deprivation.

- ✓ **Include** small portions of **favorite** foods regularly.
- ✓ Choose nutritious **foods you genuinely enjoy**, so you feel satisfied and less deprived.
- ✓ **Stay hydrated**—sometimes cravings are triggered by thirst or dehydration.
- ✓ **Plan regular meals** and snacks to prevent extreme hunger.

### The Importance of Dietary Adherence Over Perfection

In nutrition, adherence—how consistently you follow your dietary plan—matters far more than being perfect every single day.

- ✓ **Consistency Beats Perfection:** It's better to be consistent 80% of the time than perfect sporadically.
- ✓ **Small Deviations Are Normal:** Occasional indulgences or days slightly above your calorie targets are normal and expected.
- ✓ **Avoid the “All or Nothing” Mindset:** One day of indulgence doesn't ruin your progress. Flexible dieting promotes returning to balanced eating immediately after occasional indulgences.