**Flexible Diet (IIFYM). A Complete Guide.**

Flexible dieting(If It Fits Your Macros) is a nutrition model popularized in the United States among bodybuilders, and it has been mentioned since the 1980s and 1990s. Flexible dieting requires us to monitor our intake of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats, known as macronutrients. They are called macronutrients because we need large amounts of these elements, while micronutrients—vitamins and minerals—are needed in smaller quantities. By knowing our caloric intake, we can include various foods in our diet as long as they fit within our carbohydrate, fat, and protein requirements. There are no forbidden or excluded foods, with only a few exceptions. The goal of flexible dieting is to allow us to enjoy "unhealthy foods" in moderation and under certain conditions, rather than constantly. The foundation of any good diet, regardless of its name, should always be whole, unprocessed foods. The key terms in flexible dieting are caloric surplus and caloric deficit: 1. **Caloric Deficit**: When we consume fewer calories than we need, we can lose weight. 2. **Caloric Surplus**: The opposite of a caloric deficit, where we gain weight by eating more than we expend throughout the day. 3.**Caloric Balance**: The middle ground between a caloric deficit and a caloric surplus, where we neither gain nor lose weight. The caloric balance is often associated with both Total Daily Energy Expenditure (TDEE) and Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR), but they refer to different aspects of energy expenditure: 1. **Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR)**: BMR is the number of calories your body needs to maintain basic physiological functions at rest, such as breathing, circulation, and cell production. It's a measure of the minimum energy required to keep your body functioning while at rest for 24 hours. 2. **Total Daily Energy Expenditure (TDEE)**: is the total number of calories your body needs in a day, taking into account all activities. It includes BMR plus the calories burned through physical activity, digestion, and other daily activities. TDEE is calculated by adding the BMR, the energy expended in physical activity, the thermic effect of food (TEF), and any other energy expenditures.

If we find our caloric balance—the point at which we neither gain nor lose weight—we can easily adjust our diet to achieve our goals. For example, if we maintain our weight at 2500 calories (caloric balance) and our goal is to gain muscle mass, we will need to add more calories to our caloric balance. Conversely, if our goal is to lose weight, we will need to subtract calories from our caloric balance. It is recommended to do this gradually; for instance, if we want to lose weight, we can reduce our intake from 2500 calories by 200 calories, resulting in a daily intake of 2300 calories. This means we need to consume 2300 calories each day to be in a caloric deficit. When aiming to gain weight, we can add 200 calories to our caloric balance, resulting in 2700 calories. We monitor our weight, and if, after 15 days, there is no change and our goal is to lose weight, we subtract another 100 calories (2200) and so on. Similarly, if we aim to gain weight and there is no change at 2700 calories, we add another 100 calories (2800) and so forth until we see a change in our weight, depending on our goals. It is important to note that regardless of our goal, our caloric intake on rest days should be at our caloric balance (2500). That is, on days with physical activity (running, weight training, martial arts, etc.), calories should be according to our goal, namely a caloric surplus (2700) or a caloric deficit (2300). Now, the question arises:

How do we distribute our macronutrients?

How do we distribute our macronutrients based on calories once we have decided on our goal? For the example, let’s assume we are an 80 kg male aiming to gain muscle mass (caloric surplus - 2700). The word "protein" is derived from the Greek word "proteios," which means "primary" or "of first importance." This, in turn, comes from "protos," meaning "first." This means we should start with protein. One gram of protein has 4 calories. If you exercise, the recommended intake is 1.8 to 2.2 grams per kilogram of body weight per day. Let’s choose 2.2g per kilogram of body weight. This means: 80kg (our weight) x 2.2g = 176g. We will need to consume 176g of protein per day. 176g x 4 (per gram of protein) = 704 kcal. 2700 – 704 = 1996 kcal. Next, we continue with fats: One gram of fat has 9 calories. The recommended intake is 0.9-1.5 grams per kilogram of body weight. 0.9 x 80 = 72g fats. 72 x 9 (per gram of fats) = 648 kcal. 1996 – 648 = 1348 kcal. The remaining calories, namely 1348, are for carbohydrates. One gram of carbohydrate has 4 calories. 1348 / 4 = 337g carbohydrates. Here’s an example if we are an 80 kg male aiming to lose weight/fat/muscle mass (caloric deficit - 2300). Since it is impossible to avoid losing some muscle mass along with fat in a deficit, to minimize this, we should keep protein levels high and aim to maintain as much strength as possible. Starting with protein: 80kg (our weight) x 2.2g = 176g. We will need to consume 176g of protein per day. 176g x 4 (per gram of protein) = 704 kcal. 2300 – 704 = 1596 kcal. Next, we continue with fats: 0.9 x 80 kg = 72g fats. 72g x 9 (per gram of fats) = 648 kcal. 1596 – 648 = 948 kcal. The remaining calories are for carbohydrates: 948 / 4 (per gram of carbs) = 237g carbohydrates. After these calculations, we should know which days we will be exercising and which days we will be resting. On rest days, we should consume our caloric balance. **Important: These are only example values!**

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