

PHYSIONIC  
THE BEGINNER'S  
GUIDE TO FLEXIBLE  
NUTRITION 1.0



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Hello, and welcome to the Beginner's Guide to Flexible Nutrition. As with my Beginner's Lifting Guide, I want to take a moment to thank you for choosing to subscribe to Physionic – I hope this guide will help you understand and implement a flexible nutrition plan for you to effectively lose fat and, equally importantly, keep it off. In this guide, we will go over basics, without getting bogged down by details that serve as unnecessary, albeit potentially interesting, details. With that said, let us begin.

# Fundamentals of Weight Loss

There is a single, fundamental, non-negotiable, critical rule we must all follow if we wish to lose weight: a calorie deficit. Without it, everything else you will read is worthless, as everything is contingent on the calorie deficit applying. Keep this single thought in mind, and we will begin to deconvolute what needs to be deconvoluted for you to achieve your goal.

## *What is a calorie deficit?*

Instead of us simply stating the importance of a calorie deficit, we should understand the term, and then get you set to find yours.

*The calorie deficit is the energy intake you should achieve to promote weight loss.*

Let's deconvolute that sentence.

Your body needs a certain amount of energy to keep itself alive. Your organs, each, need a certain amount of energy – for example, think of your heart – it is beating all day and night long - it doesn't beat on magic – it beats using the energy you provide it. The same is true of your brain, your liver, your pancreas, your immune system, your bones, your muscles, your cartilage, and literally everything else that makes up your body. Without any energy, your body has no choice, but to shut down each organ, one by one, until you die. So, every human being in this world has a set amount of energy that their body requires to maintain all their organs' energy demands. *That energy requirement is unique for each human.*

Re-reading that last sentence, we know that the energy requirements of one person are different from another; this makes intuitive sense, because if you compare a man who is 193 cm (6'4") to a woman who is 157 cm (5'2"), you can imagine his organs are much larger and need more energy to sustain a larger body (this does not even account for other factors like the sex and hormonal differences between the two – we're keeping things simple!).

So, we know that the body needs a certain amount of energy to maintain itself – solid, but how does this help with our energy (calorie) deficit?

Well, our energy deficit has to be relative to something. Think about it, how can you be “less than” (deficit) something, if you have nothing as a baseline to compare against? For example, “I am less active *now* than I was 3 *years ago* (baseline)”. Therefore, if your body needs a certain amount to maintain itself, if we can find that number for you, we can take energy away from that established number. This will lead to your body needing to fill that energy deficit with reserves that it has stored (body fat energy, preferable).

With that in mind, we need to find out our baseline, previously described as what our body needs, energy wise, to maintain itself. How do we do that?

## Determining your Baseline Energy Intake/ Total Daily Energy Expenditure

Determining your baseline energy intake (the amount of energy you need to receive to maintain your

body, as it is) comes in a variety of forms, but we will use the easiest way to determine your baseline energy intake. Before we move on, however, we will now rewrite our baseline energy intake as **total daily energy intake (TDEE)** – *they are the exact same thing*, but total daily energy expenditure is the term used far more often. We will now look at the easiest way to determine your total daily energy intake.

The absolute simplest way is to multiply your bodyweight, in lbs, by 15.5. So, for example, if you weigh 80 kg (176 lbs), you would multiply 176 x 15.5 to reach 2728. For a more exact calculation that is linked, but not written in, to this guide, check out *Calorie Calculation Guide*.

2728 what? 2728 calories. Calories are the unit of energy measurement used in nutrition and physical activity. So, from now on, when we mention calories, we are using it synonymously with energy.

Now, we have a rough idea of your predicted total daily energy expenditure (again, calories needed to maintain your body). Keep in mind, this is a predicted number, so it may be completely wrong, but it will not matter – you will reach your goal regardless, as we will go over shortly. All we wanted was a place to start – we have it now (your TDEE).

#### Note

Remember how your heart beat requires a certain amount of energy; we can switch the word “energy” with “calories” – they are the same, in this context.

### Determining your Calorie Deficit

We have our baseline, now we need to determine how aggressive you would like to be in losing weight. If you would like to go slow and steady, simply subtract 300 calories from your total daily energy intake. In our example, we reached 2728 calories as our total daily energy expenditure, so subtracting 300 calories would yield 2428 calories. If you would like to be moderately aggressive, simply subtract 500 calories from your total daily energy expenditure. Again, with our example of 2728 calories, that leaves us with 2228 calories. Finally, if you are feeling especially ambitious and want to be exceedingly aggressive, simply subtract 700 calories from your total daily energy expenditure. In our example, that would lead us to end up with 2028 calories.

#### Note

**Modest** weight loss: TDEE – 300 calories  
**Moderate** weight loss: TDEE – 500 calories  
**Aggressive** weight loss: TDEE – 700 calories

Whichever weight loss style you choose, there are advantages and disadvantages to each. A more modest style (300 calorie deficit) will take longer, but may be more sustainable. A more aggressive style (700 calorie deficit) will be far shorter, but may be difficult to sustain as you get deeper into the weight loss.

This calorie deficit number (2428, 2228, 2028 calories, in our example – yours will likely be different) is the number you need to intake every day (there are exceptions, but we will not cover them, for the sake of avoiding confusion).

### Beginning and Sustaining Weight Loss

You have your calorie deficit number, now what?



You need to consume that number of calories, every day. Obviously, no one is going to hit that incredibly specific caloric number every day, but if you can hit that target number, plus or minus 50 calories (for example, for our 2428 calorie situation, something like 2378 – 2478 calories, a day) – you’re doing well.

However, all of this is assuming the predicted/calculated total daily energy expenditure (that your calorie deficit number is based off) is correct, or even in the ballpark, but as we discussed when we calculated, it may not. How do you determine if it is accurate?

*You will need a digital bodyweight scale.*

#### Note

**How to weigh yourself:** You will weigh yourself in the morning, only. You will weigh yourself nude, or in underwear. You will not eat or drink anything before weighing. You will use the toilet, if needed, before weighing. You will not shower before weighing. You should step on and off the scale 2-3 times to get the most consistent number. All these rules are critical for accurate, consistent data base by which you will base your future progress and nutrition choices. If you fail to do it, as outlined, you will get poor results.

You should weigh yourself 2-3 times a week, every week. When you do, you will be gathering data on yourself as each weigh-in is a data point.

The way to tell, assuming you are weighing correctly, if your total daily energy expenditure is correct, is by seeing your weight remain relatively (within 450 g / 1 lb or 1 kg / ~2 lbs) stable over 1-2 weeks of weigh ins. However, you do not need to be using your total daily energy expenditure number, you can easily jump straight into your calculated calorie deficit number. If you are consuming the calories you have calculated for your calorie deficit number, every day,

and your weight is not decreasing over 2 weeks of weigh ins, you will need to make an initial adjustment.

This initial adjustment is simply subtracting another 100 calories off your calculated calorie deficit number. After the adjustment, you will gather 1-2 weeks worth more weigh in data (2-3 weigh ins, per week) and evaluate if you are losing weight or not. If not, repeat the process.

#### Note

You will lose substantial weight ( 1 – 2.5 kg / ~2 – 5 lbs) in the first week, and then it will slow down to a steady rate of loss.

### Weight Loss vs Fat Loss

Due to this calorie (synonymous with energy) deficit, the body’s needs are no longer being met, but the body still needs to fulfill the demands of its organ systems, so it begins using energy that is stored. This stored energy comes in a variety of forms, but most people want to specialize that weight loss to fat loss. However, if we only focus on calories, some of that weight loss may come from other areas we may not want to lose (muscle, bone, etc.). So, if we care about getting the body to fulfill its energy needs you are not providing it, with fat, you will need to do more than intake a target calorie number.

# Fundamentals of Fat Loss

At this point, we should understand that a calorie deficit leads to weight loss, we understand that our calculated energy deficit number should see us losing weight (as measured via accurate weight scale measures), but we also know that weight does not necessarily mean fat loss. Since our goal is to lose fat, not just weight (which might include lean tissue necessary for function, health, and have us looking great), we need to add more layers to our nutrition – those layers come in the form of *macronutrients* and *micronutrients*.

A *macronutrient* is a nutrient that makes up our food and offers us energy (the same energy your organs need). So, if you count calories only, you are still counting macronutrients, just not individually. There are three primary macronutrients: protein, fat, and carbohydrates.

## Protein

Protein gives us **4 calories per gram consumed**. Protein is critical for our health and performance, because it is the primary nutrient that also offers our body structure and function (muscle, bones, etc. are all made of protein). Interestingly, it also is the first nutrient to focus on if you want your body to lose body fat, as opposed to lean tissue (muscle, bones, etc.), because it stimulates your lean tissues to maintain and grow.

### How much protein do you need?

If you do not exercise regularly, protein can be as low as 0.8 g/kg of bodyweight (0.36 g/lb), although I would still aim for higher amounts. For example, if you weigh 80 kg, 64 grams of protein is sufficient.

If you exercise regularly (especially resistance exercise), protein should be quite a bit higher, set around 2.2 g/kg of bodyweight (~1.0 g/lb) when trying to lose fat.

## Fat/Lipid

Fat/Lipid gives us **9 calories per gram consumed**. Fat/Lipid is critical for our health and performance, as well, because it is the primary nutrient used in our cells, as well as heavily involved in our body's communication with itself (hormones, neural signals, etc.). Although fat/lipid may seem wise to skip, because we are trying to lose fat, it would be unwise, as nutritional fat/lipid comes in forms our body cannot store, so they are necessary for us to consume for our survival.

### How much fat/lipid do you need?

This macronutrient is based on percent of your calories consumed. You should be consuming at least 20% of your consumed calories in fat/lipid, and unless following a ketogenic diet (or other high fat/lipid nutrition protocols), up to 35% of your consumed calories in fat/lipid.

So, take your daily calories and multiply by .2 (for 20%) or by .35 (for 35%), which will give you your fat/lipid allotted calories, but not the grams, for which you will need to divide by 9 (because, fat/lipid is 9 calories per gram).

For example, if you consume 2500 calories a day, 20% would be 500 calories and 35% would be 875 calories. Then, divide those by 9 to get ~56 grams of fat/lipid for 20% and ~97 grams of fat/lipid for 35%.

#### Note

I am using both terms (fat/lipid), because when we refer to “fat”, I would like us to think of “body fat”, not nutritional fat, which is more appropriately labeled as lipid, although on all nutrition labels, you will see “fat” labeled.

#### Carbohydrate

Carbohydrates give us 4 calories per gram consumed (just like protein). Carbohydrates, unlike protein and fat/lipid, are not critical to our health, as our body can survive without consuming them.

However, they often come with a series of useful, and sometimes critical, micronutrients – a topic we will cover next.

#### How much carbohydrate do you need?

Assuming you have calculated your protein and fat/lipid needs, everything else filling your daily calorie number will be carbohydrate.

#### Micronutrients

*Micronutrients* also compose our food, but unlike macronutrients, give us no energy in the sense we have been discussing it (calories). So, to be clear, *macronutrients* are the only nutrient that give us energy. Then, why care about micronutrients?

Micronutrients are vitamins and minerals that our body needs to function properly. Without them, our body cannot use macronutrients. So, while macronutrients give us direct energy for our organs, micronutrients are a bit like the “tools” needed to use that energy.

In this guide, we will not go over each micronutrient (they are numerous), but rest assured, if you look up the recommended intake of each, you should be aiming to achieve that recommendation, set for your body (based on age, sex, physical activity level, and other parameters). You may want to focus on macronutrients for your weight loss and fat loss, but if you care for your health in the least, keeping an eye on micronutrients (reaching your daily amount) is key.

#### Decision Time: Your Three Choices

Now that we have gone over how to calculate your calories, as well as each of your macronutrients, you have a decision to make: How much tracking do you want to do?

This means, how many of these numbers do you want to trouble yourself with – admittedly, the more you can do, the more exact your results; remember, however, sustainability is the key, so be honest with what you can do, because all of these methods will yield results.

#### Choice 1: Counting Calories

You only track your calories, you do not care about macronutrients. This is the easiest, but it will yield less

fat loss and more weight loss (meaning, you will still lose majority body fat mass, but some of your weight loss may be lean mass). This is also quite common and takes many of the benefits of both other choices.

### **Choice 2: Counting Calories & Protein**

You track your calories, but also incorporate your protein intake. This way, you maximize fat loss, as well as weight loss, as protein will preserve lean mass that would otherwise be lost. If you exercise, this, or choice 3, are recommended.

### **Choice 3: Counting Macronutrients**

In this instance, you no longer need to count calories – why? Because, as we know from before, macronutrients are the nutrients that give us calories, so all calories come from our macronutrients; therefore, if you are tracking macronutrients, you are indirectly counting your calories (add up your macronutrients and they will equal your target calories). This can be tricky, because you are trying to fit a certain amount of each macronutrient into your daily goal, you are tracking three separate numbers and finding foods that fit your remaining macronutrient gaps (especially at the end of the day), can be difficult. However, this also offers the most precise information on your nutrition. Still, unless you are trying to drop enough body fat to enter a physique based competition, this is largely unnecessary.

***For example:***

*Trying to find a food that fulfills your final 11 grams of protein, 4 grams of fat, and 12 grams of carbohydrates can be challenging.*



# Approaching Fat Loss

At this point, we have covered how to lose body weight, how to make sure most of that weight loss is body fat, and three versions to choose from to achieve your goal. However, this is just a bunch of numbers without much direction on how to begin and what to do when your fat loss efforts stall (they will) – so, as a final section to this guide, let us educate ourselves on how to systematically, sustainably lose fat.

## Step 1: Determining your Goal

You are trying to lose weight, most likely fat, but how much? And by when?

### Condition 1: I care when, how much, and I plan ahead

You have a date set in your mind (a wedding, spring break, beach vacation, etc.) – then you need to back calculate, let's walk through it.

*We will assume one point – you will lose weight at a rate of .45 kg (1 lb) a week.*

This assumption is based on a moderate calorie restriction (remember, TDEE – 500 calories). It is possible to lose at a faster rate and you will lose more weight in the first week as your body dumps water, but you will regain that initial first week of lost weight. This is a good target (.45 kg a week), although you could go with a more aggressive calorie deficit, because it gives you some cushion in case you falter along the way – no one is perfect, no one.

Now, when is your goal day?

Better stated, how many weeks until your goal day? The number of weeks reflect the amount of weight you will lose, conservatively speaking – we want to temper our expectations so that if things go exceedingly well, you may be pleasantly shocked.

#### ***For example:***

*If your goal day is in 11 weeks, you can expect to lose 5+ kg (11+ lbs) – you will likely lose more, if you are consistent and accurate.*

That all said, simply start your calorie deficit (we will go over this in more detail soon) when you are the appropriate amount of weeks out from your goal date.

#### ***For example:***

*If you want to lose 6.8 kg (15 lbs), then begin 15 weeks out (again, you will likely crush this goal, but being conservative allows immense flexibility and psychological well-being).*

## Condition 2: I care when, I do not care how much

If you have a set goal day in mind, but you just want to generally look leaner, without a set number in mind, you have a series of choices. You, again, need to back calculate from the date, but in doing so, you have 3-4 options on how you can go about achieving your goal.

*For example:*

*If your goal day is 6 weeks away, you can lose weight at varying speeds up to that point – let us examine that.*

**Modest weight loss (TDEE – 300 calories): 1.6 – 3.6 kg (3.5 – 8 lbs)**

**Moderate weight loss (TDEE – 500 calories): 2.7 – 5 kg (6 – 11 lbs)**

**Aggressive weight loss (TDEE – 700 calories): 3.8 – 6 kg (8.5 – 13.5 lbs)**

**Severe weight loss (TDEE – 1000 calories): 5.5 – 7.7 kg (12 – 17 lbs)**

As you can see, expecting to lose 20 kg (44 lbs) in 6 weeks is unlikely, and depending how long you can bear being hungry, you can achieve substantial results within a set timeline.

To find out what is achievable within your timeline (between now and your goal day), simply figure out how many weeks are between now and your goal day. Now, take either 300 (modest), 500 (moderate), 700 (aggressive), or 1000 (severe) calories and multiply by 7. This number is your weekly calorie deficit!

Now, multiply your weekly deficit by the number of weeks between now and your goal day. This is how many calories (remember, energy!) your body will be deficient in for the duration of your weight loss, so it will fill that gap with body fat, throughout your deficit timeline. Then, take that number and divide by 3500 (calories). Now, you know how many pounds (lbs) you will lose (divide this again by 2.2 to find your kilogram loss), although thanks to water weight loss, you will likely lose 1 – 2.5 kg (2 – 5 lbs) more than that.

*For example:*

*I want to lose the most amount of weight (hopefully, fat tissue) in a 6 week period. That being the case, I am going to use a 1000 calorie deficit from my TDEE. So, multiply 1000 calories by 7 days of the week, giving me a 7000 calorie deficit for the week; but, I will be losing weight for 6 weeks, so I multiply 7000 calories by 6 to reach an ultimate calorie/energy deficit of 42,000 calories for the 6 weeks. Now, I will divide 42,000 calories by 3500 calories (this is the rough estimate for the calories in .45 kg of fat) and I will have an estimated loss of 5.45 kg (12 lbs), and likely more.*

## Condition 3: I do not care by when, but I care how much

This is an extremely flexible option, because you are not giving yourself a time table, so the extent of your weight loss is not dependent on anything, but your ability to stick to your nutrition. This is a special case, because I always err on the side of eating as much food as possible while still losing weight.

So, let us use this principle: eat as much as you can while still losing weight – slow and steady wins the race.

If you read the previous sections, you know that a modest calorie deficit is around 300 calories under your

TDEE. This means, you can expect to lose about .27 kg (0.6 lbs) a week. As I have mentioned before, you will likely lose more, especially in the first week.

## Step 2: Creating a Baseline

Alright, you know what your total daily energy expenditure is (TDEE) from the “Approaching Weight Loss” section, you know which condition is most applicable to you from step 1 of this section, but we do not know if we are making progress unless we have a baseline to refer back. You need a baseline, and to determine your baseline, you need to know one key piece of information – the variable you are trying to change: your weight. As daunting as this is for some people, it is a near necessity (there are ways around this, but I will not cover them here).

I have referred to this before, but how you weigh yourself is critical to your success:

You *must* weigh yourself in the morning, you must weigh yourself naked (or only wearing underwear).

You *must* make sure you have not consumed any food or drink.

You *must* make sure you are dry and have not showered.

You *must* use the restroom (if you need to) before weighing.

You *should* use a digital scale.

This is your true weight – it means nothing, except a baseline number – you are about to change it.

## Step 3: The Process - The Beginning

Now, you know your total daily energy expenditure (TDEE), you know the condition you want, and you know your baseline – let us begin morphing into a slimmer, sleeker version of yourself.

You have determined your baseline (body weight) on the day (or the day before) you have started your calorie deficit. You are in your first week of your weight loss/fat loss; you are using one of the three methods discussed in the Fundamentals of Fat Loss section (calorie counting, calorie counting plus protein counting, or full on macronutrient counting).

I recommend you weigh yourself at least 2 times a week (beginning and middle of the week, for example), but you can certainly weigh yourself more often (assuming you do not get obsessive about it – remember, your weight is simply data, nothing more). If you are losing weight after the first or second weigh-in, you have started your journey and are set (but, read the next sections to find out how to keep the progress rolling).

If, after the first week, you have not lost weight, yet you have been tracking accurately (calories, protein, or all the macronutrients) – your estimated TDEE is incorrect. It is not your fault, you did things correctly, but the estimate is off. You need to take the calories you have been consuming (with the assumption they are putting you in a deficit – which they are not, clearly) and make *that* your new TDEE.

### Note

It is critical that you have been tracking accurately, otherwise this change in TDEE can put you in a drastic position – we will cover how to track accurately later on, to be sure.

With your new TDEE, re-establish a calorie deficit based on your new TDEE – try being a bit more conservative with your new deficit.

If you are calculating macronutrients, it is customary to reduce carbohydrates over the other two macronutrients, because both of the others are critical to life and supply a host of other benefits. If you need to make your calorie deficit more pronounced, you will remove carbohydrates (1 gram is equal to 4 calories, remember).

#### Step #4: The Process – Adjustments & Plateaus

After a while, no matter your calorie deficit (modest, moderate, aggressive, etc.) – your weight loss will begin to slow until you are no longer losing weight, this is called a plateau. What do you do?

First, you check you have been tracking accurately and consistently – this can get away from us from time to time; you may be introducing a few hundred calories somewhere, unbeknownst to you. If you have checked and you are still stalling, using body weight as your outcome, then it is time for an adjustment.

An adjustment is extremely simple – you simply reduce your calories an additional 100 calories. So, if you are in a 500 calorie deficit and it is no longer working – drop an additional 100 calories to make it a daily deficit of 600 calories off your established TDEE. If you are counting macronutrients, you would typically remove these additional calories from carbohydrates, but a little can come from fat/lipid.

***For example:***

*Those who are counting macronutrients, you are trying to create a further 100 calorie deficit, and as you know that carbohydrates are 4 calories per gram, you can reduce your carbohydrates for the day by 25 grams (25 grams x 4 calories = 100 calories).*

*What if you cannot reduce your calories any further?*

There might come a time in which you are in such a severe calorie deficit that you find it hard to keep on track as your energy levels have plummeted, potentially your sex drive has reduced, and you are having constant cravings for various foods. Well, your body is fighting back by releasing a series of hormones, but there is something to be done – stop your calorie deficit.

I realize this is counterintuitive if you have not reached your goal, but your body is pushing back so vehemently, you need to take a break, otherwise you will keep torturing yourself, tracking will slip, you may snack more, you may binge, or any other number of situations where calories will be introduced, making the whole calorie deficit experience a fruitless, depressing mess. So, you take a break; this does not mean your weight loss goals are over, but it allows you to psychologically and physiologically relax. So, do you stop tracking? Not at all. However, you will eat more – how much more? You will eat at your established total daily energy expenditure (TDEE). How long? Anywhere from 2 days to 2 weeks of glorious consumption at your maintenance calories (same as TDEE).

What will happen? You will gain a little weight (1-2 kg / 2 – 4.5 lbs) back as the water weight you dumped in the initial week will return. Do not panic – this is unavoidable, expected, and *wanted*. This water weight is not fat tissue and is reinserting itself in your lean tissue (muscles, for example) – you will lose it again, once you re-establish your caloric deficit. After an initial weight gain, you should see your weight stay stable (within .45 – 1 kg / 1 - 2 lbs fluctuations up and down), if it continues to rise after the first week (assum-

ing you take a break for longer than a week), reduce your calories a small amount (1-200 calories).

### Step #5: Goal Reached - Now What?

Eventually, you will reach your goal – it took sacrifices, determination, and honesty with yourself, and you likely feel aptly happy for your success – I am, too. However, you have been on a journey to move from point A to point B, so what do you do now? You cannot go back to your old ways of eating unless you would like to see your journey in reverse as you travel back to point A. Do you ever get to take a break? Yes.

The greatest gift you gave yourself up to now is not your weight loss (although telling that you know how to achieve it), but the habits you have built up based on a foundation of education. This will need to continue, but you will have more breathing room in terms of how much you can eat.

Much like the end of the last step (step 4) in this section, you will move your calorie goal back up to your total daily energy expenditure number – this is your maintenance. If you have lost substantial weight, you may want to aim for 100 calories under your TDEE – you are moving less bodyweight, so you are expending less energy (makes sense, right?). Still, if you have been in a 700 calorie deficit from your total daily energy intake, you get to eat 700 calories a day more while not gaining weight.

That last statement is not entirely true – you will gain a little initial weight, as your water weight (1 - 2 kg / 2 - 4.5 lbs) will reintroduce itself; however, this water weight is applied to your lean mass (ex. muscle), not your fat mass – making you look more muscular and lean. After this initial reintroduction, you should not see your weight increase from that point (so, you will still need to weigh yourself at least once a week, to keep track).

#### Note

What is meant by “you should not see your weight increase” is your weight will fluctuate below and above a point – the point after you have reintroduced calories back up to your maintenance (TDEE) and have regained your water weight. You should give yourself some flexibility by allowing a range of .45 – 1 kg / 1 - 2 lbs around your maintenance weight.

If, after a few weeks, you are still gaining weight – your TDEE has shifted down and you need to drop your daily consumed calories by 100 and monitor the scale – repeat as needed.

If you are still losing weight (rare, but it can happen), then you can increase your daily consumed calories by 100 and monitor the scale – repeat as needed.

*What if you don't want to count calories or macronutrients anymore?*

You do not have to, but it is certainly recommended. Consuming at maintenance offers you the flexibility to eat more, but does not afford you the freedom to forgo your learned habits. However, assuming you do not want to be as strict with weighing or keeping track of varying numbers (depending on the method you have chosen), then you are certainly free to do as you wish, but it is imperative you continue to monitor your weight on the scale at least once a week so you can adapt your eating habits based on the feedback the scale is giving you.



# Understanding Nutrition Labels & Tracking Food

You understand what to do, but to be frank, many people are nutritionally illiterate in terms of understanding how to track their intake, and that is no surprise as no one has ever taken the time to explain the process – let us do that now.

There is a step by step process you can follow for reading a nutrition label and applying it to your overall nutrition.

If we take an example nutrition label, which may be different depending on your country, we can break this process down simply.

## Calories

The first number you should look for is the calories, which will typically be the largest, and/or the most isolated, number – that is the amount of energy you will intake from eating this food or drink.

So, in this example, there are 230 calories.

## Serving Size

Immediately after you have determined the calories, you should look at serving size – this signifies how much of this particular food or drink you can eat to receive the labeled calories. Usually, this is listed in grams (this is why getting a food scale that measures grams is critical), and may also be shown in other measures (they are equal, but use grams when possible).

In this food, the serving size is 55 grams. So, 55 grams of this food, weighed out and consumed, will offer you 230 calories. Eating more than this serving will yield more calories consumed, and eating less will yield lower calories consumed – naturally.

So, if you decide to eat two servings, you double 55 grams by 2 and weigh out 110 grams – and, of course, you will need to do the same to your calories consumed ( $230 \times 2 = 460$  calories consumed).

*If you calculate macronutrients:*

If you calculate macronutrients and not calories (or both), you can simply look at the grams of each macronutrient, located below calories – look, primarily, at total amounts of each (total fat/lipid, total carbohydrate, and protein). Since you know how many calories are in each macronutrient (mentioned in previous sections), you will be able to multiply the corresponding macronutrient number (in grams) on the nutri-

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
<b>8 servings per container</b>	
Serving size	2/3 cup (55g)
Amount per 2/3 cup	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>230</b>
% DV*	
<b>12%</b>	<b>Total Fat</b> 8g
<b>5%</b>	<b>Saturated Fat</b> 1g
	<b>Trans Fat</b> 0g
<b>0%</b>	<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg
<b>7%</b>	<b>Sodium</b> 160mg
<b>12%</b>	<b>Total Carbs</b> 37g
<b>14%</b>	<b>Dietary Fiber</b> 4g
	<b>Sugars</b> 1g
	<b>Added Sugars</b> 0g
	<b>Protein</b> 3g
<b>10%</b>	<b>Vitamin D</b> 2mcg
<b>20%</b>	<b>Calcium</b> 260mg
<b>45%</b>	<b>Iron</b> 8mg
<b>5%</b>	<b>Potassium</b> 235mg
* Footnote on Daily Values (DV) and calories reference to be inserted here.	

tion label by the correct caloric content per gram.

In this food, per serving, you are receiving 37 grams of carbohydrates, and as we know carbohydrates are 4 calories per gram, we simply multiply 37 by 4 for an end result of 148 calories.

*If you track micronutrients:*

Under protein, there is a thick black bar, under which several vitamins and minerals are listed – however, this is not an all-inclusive list – the food or drink likely contains more, but these are the most prominent or the federally mandated ones shown.

**Note**

If you use a phone application (covered in the next section), you can also just scan the food's bar code (if it has one) and all this information (calories, macronutrients, and micronutrients) will be calculated for you. However, you are still responsible for consuming the amount listed as a serving – do not cheat yourself!

**Note**

You may see percentages listed for daily values – ignore them, they are not representative of your body's needs, because they are based on a 2000 calorie diet only – focus on the absolute numbers (calories and grams).

# Necessary (and Useful) Tools

Regardless of which approach you choose, there are particular items you will need to succeed and a few others that are optional, but useful.

## Your Bodyweight Scale

The first critical, and likely obvious at this point, tool is a bodyweight scale. This is the tool that will tell you if you are on the right track or not – if not, the number will not decrease. Without a bodyweight scale (and the information it provides), you are marching in, potentially the wrong direction, in the pitch black.

Your bodyweight scale should be a digital scale – that is the only requirement; forget the ones that tell you your body fat percentages, muscle mass, and water content – they are gimmicks.

## Your Food Scale

The second critical tool is a food scale. The food scale gives you the accurate, consistent information on how much you are consuming – without it, guessing your portions is a slippery slope that often does not end in success.

Your food scale should also be digital and should be able to measure in grams, as grams are the most accurate form of weighing (even more accurate than ounces). Ounces are acceptable, but not preferred. Fortunately, most scales measure both. You need to weigh as much of your food as possible.

## Your Tracker

The third tool is less critical, but certainly extremely useful – some form of tracker for your food. No doubt, tracking your overall intake is critical, but how you do it is up to you – a piece of paper? Great. A phone application? Great. A stone you chisel on? Odd, but it will work. Paper is, fortunately, cheap, and phone apps (ex. MyFitnessPal or MyMacros +) are often free or cheap, as well as have built in bar code scanners that do the work for you – I would recommend either.

## Your Tape Measure

The fourth tool is not necessary, but can be helpful – a tape measure. If you want to take measurements of your waist, arms, and other areas of your body, you can also track that way, but I insist you use the bodyweight scale as your primary method of tracking your progress. A tape measure can help by adding more information, especially if you have not lost weight, yet your measurements are smaller. I would, however, encourage you not to track your measurements every week, but rather, every several weeks or every month, as your progress will be more evident and encouraging that way (weight loss takes a long time!).

## Conclusion

I genuinely hope you now feel prepared to tackle any weight loss, fat loss journey you wish to take on. This guide should have provided you with a basic understanding of nutrition with the aim to create your own weight loss plan, while also offering solutions to common problems people tend to encounter along their journey. If you found this guide useful, please consider sharing it, as well as subscribing to the various Physionic platforms (I can be found on all major social media platforms). Thank you, and all the best!