

Ep #102: A Simple Approach to Calories and Macros



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Carrie Holland, MD, CPT

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Ep #102: A Simple Approach to Calories and Macros

This is the *Strong Is a Mindset* podcast, Episode #102. If calories and macros are confusing to you, let me help you with a very simple approach.

This is the *Strong Is a Mindset* podcast, where you'll learn how to build both a strong body and a strong mind by eating, moving, and thinking. I'm your host Physician, Personal Trainer, Certified Health Coach and Certified Life Coach, Carrie Holland.

Hey, how are you? What's new, what's good? So, what's good here, we are going to talk about calories and macros today. We're going to cover how you approach both calories and macros, and I'm going to give you some ideas to make this easier for you. I know it can get really confusing about what to do with your macros and I want to demystify this for you.

I get asked about it all the time, and there's so much science, pseudoscience and anecdote out there, so I want to try to pull this apart and make things easier for you. And we're going to pull in macros to talk about this, because I really like taking this approach, and I believe that it makes planning a heck of a lot easier.

We're diving into this because it comes up so commonly, and there is still so much confusion about how to eat. That is because... I will stand on this hill for forever... but there really is no one right way to eat, there really isn't. There is no one right way to eat, okay? But we can get so easily swayed and thrown by the newest book or the latest fad, or who in the health and fitness world is hot right now, what some influencer is saying, or what your friend or coworker is doing, and it can be totally overwhelming.

So, I'm going to try to make this simple for you. One other thing before I get into it. Something else I want to point out from the outset is this. I see this all the time and I just want to call it out right from the start because I've seen my clients get so tripped up by this, I've gotten so many questions about it, and I want to hit it face on right at the beginning.

When you see someone on social media post their before-and-after picture, I guarantee that if you look in the comments, you will find someone asking,

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“Hey, can you tell me what you ate to get that way?” And then, you'll see that person share all of the details. She will tell you everything that she eats in a day. As a matter of fact, I just saw it the other day.

So, I'm in all kinds of groups, and I saw a post in a group about someone who lost a ton of weight. And she posted, down to the macro and down to the gram, what she ate in order to get that way. And while that may be helpful for some people, to be honest, I don't really know if it is. At the risk of catching some heat for this, I don't know that it's helpful to know what somebody else's total food intake is.

I don't know how helpful it is to see the pictures, along with her calories and her macro split. And that is for a number of reasons. One, your fit friend on Facebook is not you. You do not have her metabolism, her genetics, her medical history, or her dieting history. You're not the same people.

But it can be super compelling when you see pictures of a person who's super thin, looking all kinds of ripped, posting her before-and-after pictures and sharing the change in her weight and wonder, “Hey, maybe if I eat 30 gm of almonds like she does and stick to 1,700 calories like she does, maybe I'll look like that.”

It can be a very, very slippery slope. Because you are not your friend. So, we have no idea if eating the way that your friend does will result in the body that she has. And chances are good, the answer is no.

Second, we have no idea what your fit friend on Facebook is really doing. So, even though she's posted down to the gram everything she's eating, we have no idea how many ups and downs she's had, how much weight she's lost and regained, how much or how often she's plateaued. We really just don't know. We also don't know if there's any underlying disordered eating, a full-on eating disorder, or body dysmorphia going on.

So, it can be a really, really slippery slope to compare yourself to that person. We don't know what her day to day actually looks like and how much she's really eating or not eating. And we don't know how much time

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she's really spending in the gym, or on the StairMaster, or on her Peloton. There are just so many variables here.

And remember that Facebook, and all social media really, is a highlight reel. So, you're likely seeing the highlight without getting the full picture of what really went on behind the scenes for your friend to ultimately look like that.

And third, while your super fit friend is surely posting from good intentions, it often leads you to compare and despair. So, it can be hard to see someone else's pictures, coupled with her calories and macro split down to the gram, and not compare. That comparison, most times, does you absolutely no good. In fact, most commonly, I see you use those before-and-after of Facebook friends; you use those against yourself and a losing battle of comparison.

Okay, so I've certainly talked about it before. There are times when comparison *can* be used for the positive, if you do it in a way that motivates and encourages you to aim for better for yourself. When you use comparison to inspire you and use it to move you forward. But for so many of the women I work with, they don't do that.

Instead, they see their super fit Facebook friend, and they look at the details and the calories and the macros that she's eating, and then they use their friend's diet as a weapon against themselves. That just gets you nowhere.

Last, I'm just going to add this on. You often don't see the follow-up. Again, remember that these are highlights. Those fitness photos that you see are most often taken at the peak of your friend's physique, when she was totally on point with her fitness and nutrition. So, that is a blip of a moment in time.

But what about 6 months, 12 months or 2 years from now, what's going on then? I would hope that whatever your fit friend is doing is still working, and she's maintaining whatever physique she obtained in those pictures. But if

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it was extreme, if it wasn't sustainable, if it was overly restrictive, or if it was taken from an unhealthy place, then your fit friend may not be fit anymore. We have absolutely no idea.

We just have one picture, from one moment in time, when your fit Facebook friend was eating a certain calorie and macro split that may not be at all appropriate for your unique needs. Okay? And all of this is to say, please take your friend's pictures, her training regimen, and her diet, with a grain of salt. Your friend's calorie and macro breakdown and training regimen may work for her, but it may not work for you.

There are just so many factors to take into consideration that I would be very, very cautious of trying to replicate your Facebook friend's numbers, when we really don't know all of the details and we don't know all of the behind the scenes.

So, I'm not saying that your Facebook friend is shady. Okay? That's not it. But what I'm reiterating here is to not use your fit friend's calorie and macro split as a weapon against yourself. Please, take those posts and stories and pictures and numbers with a grain of salt; a very large grain of salt. I've seen plenty of them, and they could do more harm than good. Okay?

Now that my little mini rant is over, let's talk about how to make this easy for you. How do we look at your unique situation and decide how much you're going to eat from both a calorie and macronutrient standpoint? Many of you have asked about how to use macros because you don't want to count calories, and that's totally fine.

But what I will say is this. In order to figure out what your macros are going to look like, we're probably going to need to know what your total calorie goal is first. Because if you blindly count macros, with no concern for your total calorie intake, you're probably not going to make much progress. So, we're going to talk about both; calories first, and then how calories and macros relate and add up.

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And then you are in charge. You decide how you want to approach this, okay? Because think about it, if you want to know how many grams of protein to aim for in a day, that's math. And the same is true for carbs and fat. It's all math. So to start, we have to have an idea of how many calories you need, so that then you can break them down into macros.

So the next obvious question becomes, how many calories do you need? Again, another loaded question. But let me give you what we know and some tools to help you figure this out. If you want the quick and dirty way to go about it, there is a commonly accepted formula, which is to take your body weight, in pounds, and multiply it by 15. That will tell you what your maintenance calories are.

For example, if you weigh 150lbs., you take that and multiply by 15 and you get 2,250 calories. There's your maintenance. What I will add is that this multiplier of "15" is assuming that you're moderately active. Meaning, you get about 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week.

If you are less than moderately active, or you get no exercise at all, you would take your body weight and multiply by 13 to get your maintenance calories. On the flip side, if you're super active, and get more than 30 minutes of activity on most days of the week, you can multiply your body weight by 18 to get your maintenance calories.

And when I say maintenance calories, that just means the number of calories that you would need to eat in order to maintain your current weight. So, if you've been living at your current weight for a while, you can take that weight, you take that number, and multiply by 13, 15 or 18, depending on your activity level, to get an idea of your maintenance calories. This is the fast and easy way of doing it.

I will say that while that math formula comes up everywhere, and is on loads of fitness websites, there is another way to figure out your maintenance calorie needs. You can go to Google and find a "TDEE" calculator. That is a calculator that will determine your Total Daily Energy

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Expenditure, or TDEE, which is a little more precise and is based on your age, height, weight, gender and activity level.

I like the TDEE calculator because it uses an equation that's widely accepted in sports medicine literature, as it's thought to be the most accurate. Tdeecalculator.net uses the Mifflin-St. Jeor equation, which is thought to be the most accurate, especially when you're calculating for people with obesity.

Some other calculators will use the Harris-Benedict equation, which is another commonly used equation, and it's also well tested in the literature. Either way, if you want another way to calculate your calorie needs, you can start there. Again, I like Tdeecalculator.net; you plug in your numbers and you get an approximate value for your maintenance calories.

Here's the other caveat that I would add to this. Most TDEE calculators will ask you to rate your activity level, and that will be anywhere from sedentary to heavy exercise. And what I have found, in my experience using these calculators for years, and doing these calculations both on myself and for my clients, is that I go by one level lower than I think.

So, if I have someone who reports "heavy exercise," I would actually choose "moderate exercise." Or if I have someone who reports "moderate exercise," I find that the caloric estimates are more accurate if you use "light exercise." And I believe, this is my theory, that this is in large part due to our overall activity level.

As an example, you might exercise six or seven days per week for an hour or more, and that's a legit amount of exercise. However, if for the rest of the day, you are seated in front of a computer not moving, or if you're just not super active for the rest of your day, then we need to take that into consideration.

So, remember that planned exercise only accounts for a very small percentage of your overall energy expenditure, like up to 10%- to 20-ish% for most people, and up to 30% for a top-level, highly trained athlete. But

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regardless of your exercise, if you're sedentary the rest of the day, that's an important thing to note, and it's going to affect your total daily energy expenditure. We need to reflect that in the math of the calculation.

Again, this is just my approach. There is no literature on this, but I usually take your activity level, and my own... I take my own activity level down one notch from what it actually is... to get a more accurate representation of caloric needs. Okay?

From there, once you've done your math, either by using the multiplier method of 13, 15, or 18, or if you do the calculation with a TDEE calculator to know what your maintenance calories are, then you can go and figure out what an appropriate caloric deficit is.

The calculators will often show you what a calorie deficit would be. They do this by taking a straight 500 calories away from whatever your maintenance calories are calculated to be. So, this is where I want to stop and pull this apart, because this is where you can run into trouble before you even get started.

There is a problem with using a straight 500 calorie deficit across the board. There are a number of reasons for this, and we're going to get into that. First, I've mentioned it before but it's worth repeating here. If you have low muscle mass to begin with, and if you are largely sedentary at baseline, when you go to do the math and calculate your numbers, you may find that your maintenance calorie level is pretty low.

And then, when you go and try to establish a caloric deficit on top of an already low maintenance calories, you've got barely any calories left, which means you're hardly eating anything.

As an example, say you do the math and you find that your maintenance calories are 1,500. If you go by the typical math of subtracting 500 calories to create a deficit, you're down to 1,000 calories a day. That is a hard stop right there. I've said it before, I will say it again here, but women should not

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be eating below 1,200 calories per day, and men should not be eating below 1,500 calories per day, without medical supervision.

At that low level of calories, you're running the risk of vitamin and mineral deficiencies. That's just not healthy, and you would need to be medically monitored. Okay?

So, if you do the math, determine your maintenance calories, and you realize that your maintenance calories are pretty low, you may have a really hard time creating a calorie deficit. And going by the traditional model of subtracting 500 is likely not going to be feasible or practical or safe for you.

And if that is the case for you, and you do your math and see that your maintenance calories are already pretty low to begin with, there are a few things to consider here. First, if your maintenance calories are low, meaning you have a low total daily energy expenditure at baseline, consider making building muscle as your top priority.

I just talked about this in a recent podcast. So, you can go back to Episode #98, where I talk specifically about this in all kinds of detail. But for today's purposes, the quick and dirty is this. If you have baseline low muscle mass, and you have a lot of fat to lose, and you do the math and realize that your maintenance calories are fairly low, you may want to consider prioritizing strength training and building muscle before you put yourself into a caloric deficit to lose fat.

Okay, so let's talk about this. When you prioritize building muscle instead of fat loss, that means you're looking at strength training and adequate nutrition to fuel the muscle building process. Remember are what your body needs in order to build muscle, calories.

So, from a practical standpoint, that may mean that you remain in caloric maintenance, or even in a slight surplus of like 200 to 250 calories, instead of trying to take calories away. But you really dial in your protein, and your carbs too, while lifting weights in order to fuel muscle protein synthesis.

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What that means, for most people, is that the total percentage of your daily calories that you eat from protein goes up. So, you keep your calories at maintenance, or a slight surplus, but you're eating more protein.

If you think of your meals in terms of a pie graph, the piece of pie that represents protein gets bigger, while the slices of the pie chart representing carbs and fats decreases. Okay? And remember why this matters.

Remember why it is so important to work on building muscle, especially if you have low muscle mass to start.

So, think about it. What happens when you add muscle to your body? Your metabolism goes up. The more muscle you have, the higher your metabolic rate will be. And not only that, when you have more muscle, your body becomes more efficient at using the calories and macronutrients that you give it. And both of these will help you, from a metabolic standpoint, if your goal is to lose weight.

Of course, don't forget about strength, longevity, and improved function, that muscle gives you too. Don't forget about any of those either, okay? These are bonuses, in addition to the impact that muscle has on your metabolism.

So, the focus here, in this case, is less on fat loss from the outset and instead on building muscle, which can be done with strength training and appropriate nutrition. Instead of taking away calories, you would eat at maintenance, or maybe even a slight surplus, in order to promote muscle building.

This is something to consider if you want to lose weight but you have low muscle mass, or if you are largely sedentary and you don't have a high maintenance calorie level to begin with. Okay?

Alright. The other thing to note here is that if you use a TDEE calculator, or My FitnessPal, or another weight loss app to determine your caloric deficit, you will likely see your maintenance calories reduced by 500 calories a day.

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This goes back to the “3,500 calories for 1lb. of fat” myth. So, we used to think that if you cut your daily intake by 500 calories/day, and you did that for seven days, or every day for a full week, that by the numbers, that would be a 3,500 calorie deficit and you should lose 1lb.

While the math for weight loss sounds like a nice idea in theory, I have rarely seen it work out this way in real life. And that's because of the changes to your metabolism that dieting causes. It may be that the very first time you ever dieted in your entire life, maybe this math held true for a short while. But over time, the impact of dieting on your metabolism cannot be ignored. This math is not going to work, and it's no longer going to hold true.

And here's why. Your body is smart. While it may allow for some weight loss in a 500 calorie/day deficit, that's not going to last long. And your weight loss will eventually stall because your body will compensate for your 500 calorie/day deficit by reducing its expenditure to match. So, your metabolism decreases, and your new baseline energy requirements will also decrease.

The take-home here is that your body and your metabolism do not give a hoot about the math. So, when you adopt a 500 calorie/day deficit from the outset, you may notice you lose a few pounds but then your body wises up and says, “No, thank you,” and slows down its metabolism to match your new lower caloric intake.

And the more times you do this, the more you gain and lose, the more times you eat in a severe caloric deficit and rebound, the more drastic the impact will be on your metabolism. Think “*The Biggest Loser*.” Those contestants who lost a ton of weight on the show and then regained it all back, the impact of those extremes was incredibly damaging to their metabolism. And they ended up, ultimately, needing a lower caloric intake than if they had not dieted at all in the first place.

I bring all of this up to say that even a 500 calorie/day deficit may be too much for many people. It may be too drastic, and it may be too

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unsustainable. So, what do you do about this? You take a slower, more steady approach.

That could mean you do the math, figure out your maintenance calories, and then instead of going straight to a 500 calorie/day deficit, you decrease your daily calories by 10% to 20%. You can do the math and see what those numbers would look like.

For example, if you do the math and see that your maintenance calories are 1,800, you could then calculate a 10% to 20% deficit, which would be anywhere from 180 to 360 calories less per day. And from a sustainability standpoint, that will be much more tolerable, and much more sustainable, than slashing 500 calories out of your day from the get-go.

And if you're thinking that is not enough, I hear you. But I would also encourage you to think about what it would look like to cut out 500 calories from your day. Think about what you're currently eating and think about how easy or challenging it would be to cut out 500 calories. For most people, that is just not easy to do.

Instead, I would consider a slower, more steady approach. Consider a reduction of 10% to 20% of your total calories, instead of a blanket approach of 500.

And I'll be the first to admit, there is no hard and fast science to back this up. If you go to the literature, you will still find studies and papers and websites that talk about a 500 calorie/day deficit, which for most people is pretty extreme and not sustainable for the long term.

But I also want to be transparent that, as of yet, there is no hard and fast rule as to what your caloric deficit should be in order to lose weight. There are still websites and some institutions that go by the 500 calories/ day math. And what that tells me is that we still have a lot of work to do as far as what we recommend people to do to lose weight.

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For me personally, what I do with my clients is we talk about it. There is no one-size-fits-all approach here. What I do is aim for a slight stretch. If a client wants to know her numbers, I will go through them with her, so she's got an idea of what her maintenance calories are. And then, we decide where to take it from there.

We're looking for something that will be a challenge but is still attainable, and that isn't going to wreak havoc on her metabolism. And most times, that ends up being anywhere from 10% to 20% of a caloric reduction. And regardless of what deficit we decide, we are constantly checking in during her sessions to make sure she's feeling well, she's not crazy hungry, she's not irritable, she's not having trouble sleeping.

So, whatever deficit you decide, it needs to be sustainable and doable for the long term if it's going to work. And I bring this up, because I find, for most people, a drastic calorie deficit, especially a straight 500 calorie deficit across the board from the outset, is neither doable nor sustainable.

This is especially true if you have low muscle mass, are not very active, and have low energy needs from the start. It just does not make sense to take your calories down super low if you don't have an adequate maintenance level to begin with.

And this is all very individualized, okay? This is why you have to take what the websites and the calculators and My FitnessPal says and take that with some serious caution. Alright?

Now, if you do have some muscle, or if you're active, and you do the math and you see you have more of a total energy expenditure to work with, that means your maintenance calories are higher, you may be able to create a larger caloric deficit from the outset.

So, maybe you have a maintenance calorie level of over 2,000 as an example. And then it isn't such a stretch for you to create a 400 or maybe a 500 calorie deficit. If that's the case, you can certainly do that. You could take your calories from 2,000 down to 1,500 or 1,600.

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I would just simply caution that even if you go this route, and go for a 500 calorie deficit out of the box, as you lose weight, you will see that your weight loss stalls. That's because of the impact of weight loss on your metabolism, okay?

And then, in order to maintain that deficit, you'll have to keep cutting your calories lower and lower, and that is going to get unpleasant. So, all of this is to say I would be very conscientious of how you determine your calorie needs, and be very careful about deciding a super low deficit from the beginning, because that's not going to leave you much room to move. And this will become especially apparent when your weight loss stalls.

I'm making such a big deal about this because what I will often see is that you go the extreme route; you cut your calories super-duper low, but it's miserable and it's not sustainable. Then you rebound and regain the weight, and in the process, you mess with your metabolism. And then, if you go at it again, you have to create an even bigger caloric deficit to produce weight loss the next time you try to diet. Rinse and repeat.

This becomes a very, very slippery slope. So, what I would suggest is a moderate calorie deficit, again, like 10% to 20%, maybe a bit more if you have a bit of muscle and a higher starting maintenance calorie level. And then, you keep at it.

You know I cannot talk about weight loss without mentioning consistency. So, the key here is that whatever deficit you land on, whether that's 180 calories or 400 calories, the key here is that you are consistent with it. Because it's the slow, steady, consistent caloric deficit that is ultimately going to work, versus the up again, down again extremes. Please, this really is the time to remind yourself that slow and steady works. Okay? That is what works.

Alright, so now that we've talked about your calorie needs and creating a calorie deficit, let's talk about macros or macronutrients, like protein, carbs, and fat. When we're talking about macros, we're really just looking at the

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makeup of your calories. That's the combination of protein, carbs and fat that make up your meals.

As a reminder, carbs and protein each have four calories/gram, and fat has nine calories/gram. There are so many different ways to approach how you eat: low carb, high fat, high protein, and every shade in between. So you may be wondering, what exactly should I be doing? How much should I be eating of each?

It's fascinating, if you go to Google and search "what is the best macro split for fat loss," you will see all kinds of opinions. And surprise, none of them agree. And with good reason. There is no one macro split that is accepted across the board for optimal weight loss. Okay?

And to be honest, let me put it this way. If your goal is fat loss, the macro split really doesn't matter. Really. Whether you eat 40% carbs or 30% fat, or whatever, really, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter if your goal is fat loss. And the literature backs this up. There really is no one macro split that is better than others for fat loss.

What matters more is establishing a consistent calorie deficit. However, with that said, the one thing I will say is that we're seeing more and more literature suggesting the utility of increasing protein in our diets, whether your goal is fat loss, muscle gain, or even weight maintenance.

I have extolled the virtues of protein on this podcast many, many times, and will continue to advocate for increasing protein in your diet, because we have learned so much about its benefits. If you need a reminder, protein keeps you fuller longer. It regulates your hunger hormones. It takes the most calories to digest compared to carbs or fat. And it can help decrease nighttime snacking and cravings. So, there are many, many reasons to prioritize protein in your diet.

But even with that said, we don't have one pure number. We do not have one magic percentage of protein at which all people will lose fat. Our biology just does not work that way. What we do have is the RDA standard

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of .8gm/kg of body weight. Which amounts to .36gm of protein/pound of body weight. And again, this is ideal body weight. So, if you go looking for standard protein recommendations, you will see that number referenced.

But here's a really important thing I want to point out. The RDA recommends what is needed to prevent deficiency. Okay? That is a key distinction to make. That recommendation of .36gm of protein/pound is what is needed to prevent deficiency.

I would argue that we're looking to do more than just prevent protein deficiency here. You want to lose weight. You want to build muscle. You want to keep muscle. And if those are your goals, that means you're probably going to want to increase your protein intake, to more than the minimum standard, to prevent protein deficiency.

Then the question remains, how do I do that? What do you do to take a macro approach to meals? Here's what I would suggest. There are a couple of ways to look at this. I would suggest that you aim for 20% to 30% of your daily calories from protein. I do this with my clients, depending on where they're starting from. If they're aiming to increase their protein intake, I will give them a range of what 20% to 30% of their calories from protein would look like.

Now, if you find that you tend to fall on the lower end of protein intake at baseline, that may be a stretch for you. Getting 20% of your calories from protein may be a challenge. But I would simply argue that it is absolutely possible. Even without supplements, it is entirely possible.

It requires planning. It requires intentionality. It may mean shifting the content of your meals to make them more protein centered. And it may mean that you read labels carefully to see what kind of protein content you're actually getting.

But I would argue that it is absolutely 100% possible to take in that much protein. And to be totally honest, even 20% of your daily calories from protein is on the low end. If your goal is 1,600 calories a day, for example,

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20% of your calories from protein would only be 80 gm of protein in a day. Which in all honesty is not a ton. So really, this is totally doable.

What if you're hearing all this and you're like, "Okay, this is getting complicated. I don't want to think that hard. I don't want to do all this math. Just tell me what to do." Okay, I got you, no problem. Here's what I would suggest. For most people, I would encourage you to aim for 100 gm of protein in a day, divided over your meals.

That would mean, if you eat three meals and one snack, you could do 30 gm of protein/meal... breakfast, lunch and dinner... and then, 10 gm of protein in your snack. You can absolutely, 100%, do that.

And if that still seems like too much of a jump, pick a number that seems manageable. You could start out by aiming for 20 gm of protein at your meals and slowly increase from there. And the point here is that this does not have to be, nor should it be, complicated. Okay?

Again, if you go back to what I was mentioning before, you can think of your macros as three slices of a pie chart, and all we're doing is increasing the size of protein's contribution to that pie chart, meanwhile, the proportion of carbs and fat go down. The idea here is 20% to 30% of your daily calories from protein. Or if you don't want to think that hard, aim for 30 gm of protein/meal, and 10 gm of protein for your snacks. That's it.

Now, I will say that if your goal is to build muscle, you will likely need more protein. You may need more than 30% of your calories from protein. For some people, you may need more like 1gm/pound of ideal body weight to put on muscle. And for experienced weight lifters, you may need even more, like up to 1 ½ gm/pound of body weight.

And I hear you, that's quite a bit of protein. This range is coming from the International Society of Sports Nutrition, so this is not made-up numbers or numbers that I got from an influencer's website. I bring this up, again, to say that this is entirely doable. It may be a shift from what you're used to,

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but it's totally doable. And at the end of the day, we're still learning what constitutes an ideal protein intake.

As you can see, there is a lot of variation and the answer is just not crystal clear. So, to try to make something that isn't super simple, as simple as possible, aim for 20% to 30% of your daily calories from protein, if your goal is to lose weight. Aim for the higher end, like 30%, if your goal is to build muscle. And if this is all sounding too complicated, aim for 100 gm of protein/day divided between your meals and snacks. And if that is too big of a jump for you, start slow and increase over time as you get used to it.

Okay, so now that we have tackled that beast, let's talk about carbs and fat. The percentages for these two macros are literally all over the map. Some will say that carbs should make up 50% or more of your intake. Others will go on the lower end, of no more than 20 to 30%. And fat, they range anywhere from 20% to 30% or more. It is really mind-boggling if you go and look it up. So trust me, I did, and it made my head hurt.

At the risk of oversimplifying, I'm just going to shout it out. It doesn't matter. It really does not matter. You can choose to do 20% protein, and then do an even split of 40% carbs and 40% fat. You can do 30% protein, and then 35% each have carbs and fat. You can do 30% protein, 30% carbs, 40% fat. Whatever adds up to 100%, you can do it. As long as the math adds up, you can do whatever split you want. At the end of the day, it really, truly does not matter. Okay?

Let me make something crystal clear. If your goal is fat loss, the primary target is obtaining a caloric deficit. The second target is ensuring that you're getting enough protein to maintain satiety, and mitigate the inevitable muscle loss that happens when you lose weight. Then, beyond that, it really does not matter what percentage of your diet is made up of carbs or fat. Really.

So, what I will tell my clients to do, and what I would encourage you to do, is choose how you like to eat. If you're like me, and you absolutely love peanut butter, then more of your calories may come from fat. If you love

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bread and pasta, then more of your calories may come from carbs. It really doesn't matter.

Until we have better science, we just cannot say with absolute certainty that one macro split is better than another for fat loss. We just don't have one answer on what the right macro split is. And there likely won't be one. So, any influencer or diet book, or even physician or dietitian, who swears up and down that their way is the right way to do it is probably trying to sell you something. Seriously.

Again, I will go back to this, do what you like and do what you can stick with. Okay? I will make a big, hairy deal out of establishing a caloric deficit, because as of now we know that is essential if you want to lose weight. Again, we're learning more and more about the place of protein in your diet, and the impact that it can have on muscle building and weight loss. So, I'll make a big stink about that too.

But even with that, we still do not have a slam dunk answer, which is why I gave you a range to aim for. And there is even less evidence to support a certain percentage of carbs or fats for weight loss. So, you can think of it this way. People have lost weight following Keto and eating very, very little carbs. People have lost weight on low-fat diets. People have lost weight on high-protein and low-protein diets. And the same is true for muscle gain.

There is no one “be-all end-all” right answer. People have built muscle on Keto; it takes longer, but it can be done. People have built muscle with high-carb diets, it can be done. So, because of this, that tells me there is no one right macro split that will be the magic bullet. If and when science changes, I will certainly change my story.

If you want to keep this super simple, which I will always advocate for, here's what I would do. Determine your calorie needs. You can do that by either multiplying by 13, 15, or 18, depending on your activity level. Or by using a TDEE calculator. That will give you your maintenance calories. Then decide on your deficit. So, that can be 10% to 20% of your

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maintenance calories. And you can go on the higher end of this if you have a higher maintenance level of calories to begin with.

Then, once you've got your new calories determined, pay attention to your protein. If you want to do more math, aim for a range of 20% to 30% of your daily calories in protein; on the higher end if you're looking to build muscle.

Or if you don't want to do that math, aim for 100 gm of protein/day, which divides out to 20 gm to 30gm/meal, and the remainder in snacks. Then fill your remaining calories with carbs and fat, in whatever percentages you choose, that will get you to your total daily calories. Okay? That's it. If your goal is to lose fat, that would be the simplest way to go about it.

I know I'm taking a risk here, because I'm really only focusing on two things, calories and protein. And this is not to say that carbs, especially fiber, and fat are not important. They are, they are most definitely important. And this is especially true if you want to build muscle. You certainly need carbs to drive the insulin that will get the protein to your muscles.

But the reason I don't make a huge deal out of carbs is because most people have no trouble at all getting carbs in. Most people's diets are carb heavy, and we usually have little to no problem getting our carbs in.

The key here is getting high-quality carbs. So, things like whole grains, pasta, quinoa, lentils, and of course vegetables. But the reason I'm breaking it down to these two components, calories and protein, is because I like simple and I don't want you nickel-and-diming yourself about everything you eat. I want you to be able to find a way of eating that works for you.

And if your goal is weight loss, this is a simple approach that allows for the flexibility to eat more of what you want, instead of worrying about getting exactly 35% of your calories from carbs or fat. It really does not have to be that complicated. The idea here is that if your goal is fat loss, keep those two at the forefront; establishing a caloric deficit and eating adequate protein. And again, split your carbs and fat per your preference.

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To bring this all home, remember that all the while, the goal here is sustainability. As you do this, and if you go and do the math and do the numbers and think this through, whatever you land on has to be sustainable for you. Because the idea is that this way of eating becomes your lifestyle, okay?

So, as you make these changes, I would encourage you to ask yourself, and be really honest with yourself, as you decide if this is something you can do for the long haul.

This really is not a diet that I'm talking about. We're talking about changing your approach to nutrition all together and doing it in such a way that it becomes your way of life. And for some of you, looking at your meals in terms of calories and macros can help you do that. I hope by paring it down in this way it helps you focus your efforts. Alright?

If you want help with this, let's talk. When you coach with me, we take an individualized approach and we'll come up with a way of eating that makes sense for you. You choose if you want to take a macro-based approach or not. Check out my website. Go to www.CarrieHollandMD/contact, send me a message, and let's get to work.

Alright, thank you again for hanging out with me, and I'll catch you again next week.

Hey, if you're looking for your next great read, I've got you covered. Head over to CarrieHollandMD.com/books and download my list of most favorite reads. I've got two collections waiting for you. One is all about work-life balance. The other is a collection of books that have changed my life. I've referenced many of these books in the podcast, and now you can access those titles all in one place.

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