

The background of the image shows several black meal prep containers. The top containers are filled with green beans, peaches, and a yellowish food item, possibly chicken or fish. The bottom containers are filled with a mix of blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries. The text is overlaid on the middle of the image.

MACROS 101

HOW TO MASTER YOUR BASIC NUTRITION

RE

Introduction

Unless you've been living under a rock - or are brand new to the fitness scene - you've undoubtedly heard lots of people buzzing about "**counting their macros.**" This is largely due to the rise of flexible dieting and the **If It Fits Your Macros (IIFYM) movement**, which have gained seemingly unstoppable momentum in the bodybuilding and general fitness communities. Although this nutritional approach certainly has its fair share of critics, it also has plenty of diehard fans who've **ditched simple calorie counting** in favor of tallying macros.

For decades people fixated on the number of calories consumed each day, without much thought to **where those calories came from**. Eat at a caloric deficit and you'll lose weight. Fall into caloric excess and you'll pack on the pounds. While the conventional wisdom works well in many ways, it often misses the boat by **treating all calories as though they're created equal**.

The IIFYM approach has turned the **old-school, restriction-based dieting methods** on their heads. Instead of choking down bland chicken with brown rice or a dry salad, those who espouse the IIFYM philosophy choose to nosh on a smaller quantity of donuts, pizza, or chicken fingers with the same macro values. So long as you hit certain numbers, the theory goes, the **sky's the limit on what foods you can use** to meet your individual macro intake.

Sound like a dietary technique that can be **easily abused**? It is. Seem like it may not be right for everyone? It isn't. That said, if you understand some key nutritional principles and have the discipline to monitor your food consumption, IIFYM may be what helps you **stick to a meal plan more consistently** than you've been able to accomplish in the past.

Even if you aren't going to follow an IIFYM diet, having an appreciation of these key nutritional concepts is essential for achieving the kind of **jaw-dropping, sustainable results everyone is after**. Whether your goal is torching body fat, packing on lean muscle, boosting your strength and endurance levels, or just improving your overall physical health, this comprehensive nutritional guide is your roadmap to getting there. You'll learn:

- **What macros are** and where to find them;
- How to **read a nutrition label** (without falling for the BS);
- Why it's important to **measure and weigh** your portion sizes;
- The **benefits** of following an **IIFYM-style diet**.
- Step-by-step instructions for **building your own macro-based meal plan**; and

- Common **macro FAQs**.

Ready to take the reins on your nutrition and completely transform your body? Excellent! You've picked a great place to start. Let's kick things off by answering the most obvious question first: "**What the heck is a macro?!**"

Macros 101

The term "macros" is short for macronutrients. Macronutrients are the **three major nutrients** needed for a balanced diet: **protein, carbohydrates, and fat**. (Technically, alcohol is a fourth macronutrient, but for obvious reasons it's not talked about as such.) While you can get your calories from anywhere, you have to get your macros from specific sources. Here's a breakdown of **what each macronutrient is** and **where you can get it from** in your diet:



Protein

Protein is the **most important macronutrient**, whether you're trying to build lean muscle or prevent the loss of muscle mass while eating at a caloric deficit. Protein helps control appetite. It also **combats hunger better** than fats or carbs by keeping you fuller longer. As compared to the other macronutrients, protein **requires more energy for your body to digest** and therefore causes you to expend more calories during the digestion process. This is why high protein diets are **also ideal for fat loss!**

Some solid sources of protein include eggs, milk, cheese, yogurt, chicken, turkey, pork, beef, fish, and soy. Certain foods, such as nuts and beans, are commonly cited as being good sources of protein. It's important to bear in mind, however, that **only about 15-20% of the calories** in these foods actually come from protein. Almonds, for instance, are 73% fat and only 14% protein! While these foods do contribute to your daily protein intake, you shouldn't rely on nuts or beans as your main source.



How Much Do I Need?

How much protein you should be consuming on the daily really depends on your **weight, percentage of body fat, and goals**. Some people can get away with as little as **0.5 grams** per pound of lean body mass per day, while others - typically those looking to ratchet up their lean muscle gains - need anywhere from **1.5 to 2 grams** per pound of lean body mass.

What's lean body mass, you ask? That would be your **total body weight minus your fat**. Thus, if you weigh 200 pounds and are 20% body fat, your lean body mass would be 160 pounds - 200 pounds minus 40 pounds (200×0.20). If you weigh 200 pounds with 160 of those pounds being lean body mass, a target protein intake of 0.5 grams would have you eating about 80 grams of protein per day.

Carbs

Aside from being the most hated-on macro, carbs are our bodies' **primary source of energy**. They are stored in the liver, brain, blood, and muscles as **glycogen**.

Carbs are found everywhere, including in fruits, veggies, breads, pasta, oats, cereal, candy, soft drinks, and other processed foods. Generally, your best bet is to **stock up on complex carbs** like brown rice and quinoa. Complex carbs typically **contain more vitamins and minerals**, and they're rich in fiber. Because they digest more slowly, they provide a steady release of energy instead of those crazy sugar highs and lows.

Simple carbs, on the other hand - think cupcakes, chocolate, and sodas - should be avoided due to their **high sugar content**. These types of foods **digest fairly quickly**, leaving you ravenous for your next meal and producing unnecessary insulin spikes.



[How Much Do I Need?](#)

You actually **can survive on zero carbs** . . . although it probably doesn't feel that way if you've ever tried a low-carb diet! Bodybuilders and endurance athletes, on the other hand, can eat up to **700 grams of carbs per day** because their bodies are making optimal use of the extra energy. **0.5 to 2 grams** of carbs per pound of lean body mass is probably a good range, but here again it depends on your activity levels, weight, body fat percentage, and goals.

Fat

Fat is another essential nutrient that our bodies need to work properly. Fat aids in **vitamin absorption, hormone regulation, and optimal brain function**. There are three main types of fats: unsaturated, saturated, and trans fat. On the spectrum, **unsaturated fats** get the best rap due to their positive influence on heart health, cognitive function, and recovery.

Saturated fats are also important for testosterone and hormone production. **Trans fats** are typically referred to as the "bad" fats because they negatively affect heart health and can produce metabolic abnormalities.

Fats are found in olive, coconut, canola, and other oils; peanut, almond, and other nut butters; avocados; almonds, walnuts, cashews, and other nuts; salmon and mackerel; and egg yolks.



How Much Do I Need?

It depends! The average person needs somewhere between **15% and 45%** of their total daily caloric intake coming from fat. This can vary widely depending on how many calories you're consuming and whether you're eating at a caloric surplus or deficit. Shooting for anywhere between **0.35 and 0.7 grams** of fat per pound of lean body mass per day is probably a good goal.

Nutrition Label Quick Tips

Now that you've got the macro framework down, it's time to talk nutrition labels. This is where it's really easy to get confused if you don't know what to look for and how to interpret the basics. We'll start with the concept that **all calories come from macronutrients**. Vitamins, minerals, sodium, etc. - they're all **micronutrients** that, while important, don't have any bearing on your caloric intake.

Each macronutrient contains a certain number of calories. Protein and carbohydrates both have **4 calories per gram**, while fat yields **9 calories per gram**. Here's a nutrition label for Annie's Homegrown Macaroni & Cheese that we'll use to practice the math:

Nutrition Facts		
Serving Size: 1/4 box, unprepared (71g)		
Amount Per Serving		
Calories	270	Calories from Fat 35
% Daily Value*		
Total Fat	4 g	6%
Saturated Fat	2 g	10%
Trans Fat	0 g	
Cholesterol	10 mg	3%
Sodium	530 mg	22%
Potassium		
Total Carbohydrate	47 g	16%
Dietary Fiber	2 g	8%
Sugars	5 g	
Sugar Alcohols		
Protein	10 g	
Vitamin A	100 IU	2%
Vitamin C	0 mg	0%
Calcium	100 mg	10%
Iron	0.72 mg	4%

As you'll see, this product contains 10 grams of protein. At 4 calories per gram, that would be **40 calories from protein**. On the other hand, it contains 47 grams of carbs at 4 calories per gram. That comes out to a total of **188 calories from carbs**. And the product contains **36 calories from fat** (4 grams multiplied by 9 calories per gram). Easy, right?!



If all you have to do is count up the number of grams of protein, fats, and carbs in each of your foods, why does everyone make macro tracking out to be so difficult? For one thing, **nutrition labels do you no favors** in terms of how things are expressed. Let's take a look at some of the areas people get tripped up.

Serving Size

The information you find listed on a nutrition label is for a single serving size. Many products, however, are deceptive in that the package contains **2 or 3 servings**. Sure, that 20-ounce Mountain Dew bottle you're about to chug may say it has 31 grams of carbohydrates and only 110 calories. But if you drink the entire thing - all 2.5 servings - you're looking at more like 78 grams of carbs and 275 calories. Did I mention that's all from sugar? Yikes!

Calories

Counting calories, while historically the go-to way of keeping tabs on your nutrition, tells a **very misleading story**. If all calories come from protein, fats, and carbs, there's no reason to both count your macros and count your calories. In fact, you'll probably just miss the forest for the trees by misjudging a 150-calorie snack bar as healthier than a 250-calorie turkey and avocado sandwich. Spare yourself the confusion and **skip the normal calorie counting**.

Saturated Fat

For decades we've been told that saturated fat is the devil. It causes heart disease. It leads to obesity. Well, those claims are **proving to be all sorts of false**. In reality, consistently eating more calories than you expend is what accounts for those types of health problems - not saturated fat. Saturated fat has actually been **proven to have some benefits, especially for men**, since it's a precursor to testosterone. It also improves brain functioning, nerve signaling, and immunity levels. Bottom line: Since saturated fat is incorporated in your overall fat total, there's **no need to single it out and count grams of saturated fat** specifically.



Cholesterol

Like saturated fat, cholesterol is **produced naturally in the body** and has been blamed for all sorts of chronic diseases. Doctors and researchers seem to have come around, however, and realized that **cholesterol isn't quite so bad**. There's no need to get caught up on this metric when looking at a nutrition label, unless you've been **medically advised otherwise**.

Sodium

As a mineral, sodium **doesn't contain a single calorie**. It gets a bad reputation, though, and low-sodium diets have become a fad all their own. Manipulating your sodium levels can result in **drastic short-term body weight fluctuations** - just ask anyone who's stepped on a bodybuilding stage! But in the long run, reducing your sodium intake **isn't a sustainable strategy** for transforming your physique. Your body actually requires sodium to function properly, so unless you've got **high blood pressure** or another relevant medical condition, stop stressing about your sodium intake.



Dietary Fiber

Fiber is considered a carbohydrate. Although there's no need to separately count your grams of fiber, a food's fiber content can provide a **helpful gauge of how healthy it is**. Fiber is critical for slowing digestion, decreasing blood cholesterol, and **increasing your levels of fullness** so you don't go crazy with the cheat meals. Generally speaking, foods that have a higher proportion of carbs coming from fiber are better for you.

Sugar

The important thing to bear in mind about sugar: It's a carbohydrate, plain and simple. As long as you're able to **indulge in moderation**, there's no need to rigorously monitor your sugar intake or eliminate it from your diet entirely. Use a food's sugar count the reverse of how you would use its fiber count. The greater proportion of carbs a product has coming from sugar, generally the **less nutrient-rich it is**.



% Daily Value

The percent daily values show up on every nutrition label you come across. They represent the **government-established recommended daily intake** for each nutrient based on a 2,000 calorie diet. There are a ton of problems with the daily values, including that they're **woefully outdated**, wildly inaccurate, and based on an **unhealthy macro distribution**. I equate the daily values to a traffic cop standing under a working traffic light waving wands at cars - in other words, totally pointless and worth completely ignoring.

What to Do When There's No Label

By now you hopefully feel well-equipped to decipher any nutrition label that comes your way. But the reality is, **not every food comes with nutrition facts** . . . or at least not readily accurate ones. Here are a couple strategies for measuring your macros when you don't have a label spelling it out for you:

Fruits & Veggies

While it can be tough to get a good macro read on your fruits and veggies, there are fortunately plenty of online resources to point you in the right direction. These include **Calorie King**, **MyFitnessPal**, and (my personal favorite) **Self NutritionData**. These sites will

generally give you **pretty accurate numbers**, and you can adjust the serving to measure based on size (e.g., “small” or “medium” apple), weight, or volume. Although you can eyeball it in a pinch, I always recommend **using a food scale** to double-check yourself.

Lean Meats

You can search for meat macros the same way you do with fruits and veggies. Regardless of whether you’re using a nutrition label or looking up the information online, be sure to **weigh your meat raw**. Although the meat’s weight will **decrease when you cook it** due to water loss, the nutrition facts are representative of meat in its raw state.

Restaurant Fare



Many restaurants - Cheesecake Factory notoriously not included - are pretty good about **publishing their nutrition facts online**. Some fast food chains have a PDF of their menu with nutrition info, while others have detailed **build-a-meal calculators**. For the restaurants that haven’t joined the modern era, it can be a little challenging to figure out how the meals fit your macros. The longer you’ve been macro-counting, the easier it’ll be to **guesstimate using portion sizes** on a plate. But that’s always going to be an art, not a science.

Measuring Your Food

So how do you actually put all this into practice? It starts by **buying a food scale**. It doesn’t have to be anything fancy. Most of them are cheap, have zero to no learning curve to use, and are a **great kitchen tool**. If you’ve never used a food scale before, weighing all your food with one might seem sort of obsessive. It’s not - and here’s why:

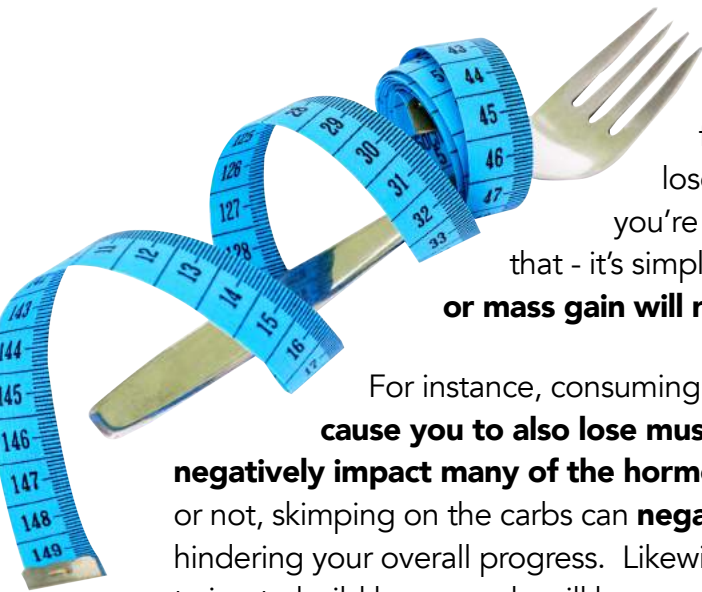
We are **notoriously bad at measuring food by hand**, eyeballing portion sizes, or anything of the like. Although you can certainly use measuring cups or spoons, there are plenty of unsuspecting pitfalls with that approach.

For one, many people have a habit of **overfilling the cup or spoon**. This may not seem like a big deal once or twice, but if done repeatedly it can lead to **consuming several hundred extra calories**. Of course, this will halt your progress, likely cause you to gain weight, and leave you



frustrated. Plus, when you use a food scale you **don't have to worry about washing** all the peanut butter, oil, and other gunk out of your measuring utensils!

Counting Calories vs. Macros



At this point you might be wondering, "This all seems really complicated. **Can't I just go back to counting calories?**". The answer is, sure. If you focus on eating at a caloric deficit, you definitely will lose weight. Similarly, if you consume more calories than you're expending, you'll put on weight. There's no magic to that - it's simple science. However, the **quality of your weight loss or mass gain will really suffer** if you just ignore your macros.

For instance, consuming insufficient protein during a weight loss cycle will **cause you to also lose muscle**. If you're not taking in enough fat, this will **negatively impact many of the hormones** that aid your weight loss efforts. And, believe it or not, skimping on the carbs can **negatively affect your training performance**, thereby hindering your overall progress. Likewise, consuming too many carbs or fats when you're trying to build lean muscle will have you looking **more Michelin Man than muscleman**.

Bottom line: It ain't enough to tally calories. If you're interested in a good looking, athletic, healthy body, you need to **pay attention to where your calories are coming from**. The only way to do that is by tracking your macros.

The Benefits of IIFYM

Before we get into the nuts and bolts of how to build a macro-based meal plan, let's talk about the positive aspects of an IIFYM diet. Generally, IIFYM tends to **work very well for folks who've been through the wringer of old-school dieting** and have yet to find something workable. There are a few key reasons for this:

No Restriction Required

Traditional fat loss approaches revolve around **strict calorie counts**, rigid food lists, and sometimes **completely eliminating entire food groups** to drop pounds. Often people have success with this strategy initially, but it's extremely short-lived. Cheat meals turn into **cheat days** when you're feeling deprived, and that turns into apathy about the diet altogether. People balloon back up to their old weight, only for the **yo-yo cycle** to start again.

IIFYM avoids this vicious cycle entirely by **promoting moderation** and inclusion of a



variety of foods, rather than labeling certain things “off limits.” Indulging yourself with something sweet or savory **doesn't have to leave you feeling guilty**, since you'll still be working toward your goal. Of course, you still might get hungry every now and then if you're eating at a caloric deficit, but it'll be a **lot more bearable**.

Improved Training Performance



If you've ever tried working out on a low-carb, low-fat, or calorie-restricted diet, you've probably noticed feelings of **lethargy, tiredness, and suboptimal performance**. While abs may be made in the kitchen, they're sculpted through your training - that's non-negotiable! Restricting your calories to insanely low levels won't help you there. Those who have success with IIFYM find that, by focusing on the role of each macronutrient, the approach allows them to **feel more energized and train with more intensity** even while torching body fat.

Fits With Your Social Schedule

The one thing everyone hates about restrictive diets: it **crimps their social style**. It's nearly impossible to attend a birthday party, go out to lunch with colleagues, or have dinner at a friend's house without indulging. Most people will **punish themselves later**, either by severely restricting their intake or eating nothing at all. And that's **not healthy or sustainable over the long run**.

Following an IIFYM diet will save you this headache and **make social situations far less stressful**. Although you still have to make sure to meet your macros, you have **much more flexibility** since you can just eat more or less protein, fat, or carbs than planned at an earlier or later meal. IIFYM is really **designed to coincide, not interfere, with your lifestyle** and daily choices. For that reason, it tends to be a dietary strategy people actually enjoy sticking to.



Research Supports It

Scientific studies - and probably your own experience - backs up how **ineffective old-school dieting** techniques are. Researchers have found that people who follow a restrictive

nutritional approach are actually **more likely to have a higher BMI** than those who roll with flexible dieting. They are also more prone to experiencing reduced feelings of self-control and **more psychological stress** around food and weight.

How to Build a Macro-Based Meal Plan

Ready to get down to business and design your very own macro-based diet? Here's a **straightforward three-step strategy** to building the perfect meal plan:

1. Find Your Daily Caloric Baseline.

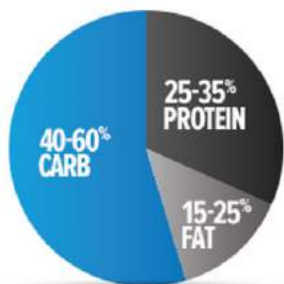
Although it's not all about the calories, you do need to start somewhere when building out your macros. There are plenty of **calorie calculators** online that will allow you to plug in information (e.g., height, weight, activity level, etc.) and then spit out an **estimate of your daily caloric maintenance needs**. Since this is what you should be eating if you want to maintain your current weight, you'll want to **add or subtract anywhere from 300 to 700 calories** depending on whether you're looking to lose or gain weight and by how much.



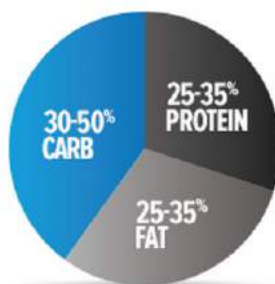
Keep in mind that online calculators are **NOT scientifically precise** and will provide only an estimate of your caloric needs. Try starting out with the baseline caloric number given to you, and **monitor how your weight reacts** eating at that level for about **5-10 days**. At that point, you can add or subtract calories as necessary to achieve your target deficit or surplus.

2. Pick a Macro Split.

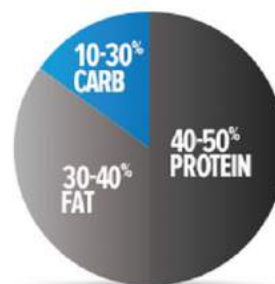
If you've heard people refer to a macro "split," all that means is the **percentage of your calories** dedicated to protein versus carbs versus fat. Here are the **three classic macronutrient splits** that you might follow, depending on your goals:



**HIGHER-CARB
FOR BODYBUILDING**



**MODERATE-CARB
FOR MAINTENANCE**



**LOWER-CARB
FOR FAT LOSS**

It's important to remember that, once you pick a macronutrient split, you need to **stick with it for a little while to give your body time to respond**. Too many people become impatient, constantly changing up their macro ratios out of a desire to experience faster results. Don't get caught in this trap - it'll only stymie your progress and drive you crazy! If you're still not noticing changes after **3-4 weeks**, it's probably about time to switch things up.

3. *Convert Your Macros Into Calories and Grams.*

Sorry, guys, but this is the part that'll require a little math. The first step here is to multiply your total caloric goal by the percentages from your split. **Make sure they add up to 100%**! That should leave you with the total number of calories coming from each of your macronutrients.



Let's take a **fat loss example**, assuming a ratio of **40% carbs, 40% protein, and 20% fat** with a total caloric intake of 2,500 calories. If you multiply each percentage by the total caloric value, you'd get 1,000 calories coming from carbs, 1,000 from protein, and 500 from fat.

To get your precise macro count, you'd then want to **divide the number of calories in each macro category** by the **number of calories in each gram** of that macronutrient. This will tell you how many grams of that macronutrient you should be eating per day.

Using our hypothetical example, you'd divide 1,000 calories by 4 (the number of calories in each gram of carbs) to arrive at 250 grams of carbs per day. You'd get the same result for protein. For fat, you'd divide 500 by 9 (the number of calories in a gram of fat), which yields 56 grams per day.

Round your numbers to the nearest gram. You can also round to the nearest five-gram mark if it's easier to remember. Voila - you've got your daily macro counts!

Macro FAQs

Over the course of my many years building clients' custom programs, there are a handful of questions that have repeatedly popped up when it comes to counting macros. Here are some of the most popular questions to help ensure you don't overcomplicate things:

1. What If I'm Not 100% Accurate?

Unless you're trying to appear on the Olympia stage, there's really **no reason to get stressed out** over being totally accurate 100% of the time. If you get within 10 grams of your target protein and carbohydrate intake, you'll be in very good shape. The whole point of IIFYM is to **allow for flexibility** while **freeing you from the need to overanalyze your intake**. If you're shooting for 175 grams of carbs, for example, anywhere between 165 and 185 grams is fine.

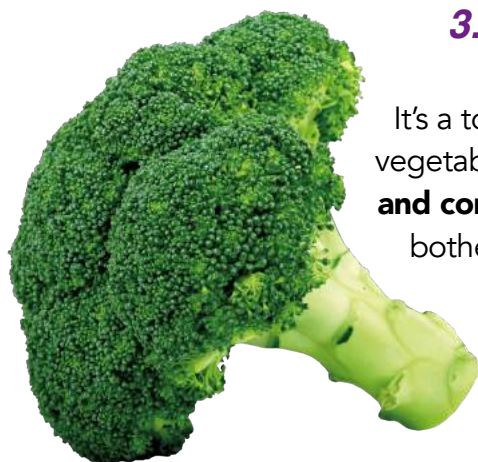
Fat, on the other hand, is **twice as calorie-dense** as protein and carbs. For that reason, you should try to limit excess fat intake to within 5 grams of your target. If your goal is 50 grams, 45 or 55 grams will suffice. The net difference will be a minuscule 45 calories.

2. What's The Best Way to Track My Macros?

Ultimately, you have to **find a way that works for you**. Otherwise you won't be consistent with it and the point will be defeated. There are a **ton of great apps** that allow macro-tracking on the go. Most of these apps have large food databases so you won't have any trouble finding the foods you need to log. Some even have a **barcode scanner** built in, making for easy tracking with packaged foods.



3. Should I Track Veggies?



It's a toss up, as there are **good arguments on both sides**. Most vegetables - with the exception of **starchy items like peas, potatoes, and corn** - contain very little calories so many people advocate against bothering to track them. Other people prefer not to omit anything from their tracking, regardless of **how few carbs their veggies have**. It's really a matter of personal preference, but if you're planning to have **more than one serving** of a veggie at a time it's probably wise to track it either way.

4. Do I Keep My Macros The Same Every Day?

No. Sure, it makes things easier to prep and consume the same amount of the same foods every day. But **your needs are bound to change** depending on your activity level and other factors. You likely don't need a different macro split for every day of the week, but your intake should differ on **training days versus rest days**. On days you don't train, your **carb**

requirements will be lower since you're burning fewer calories. Particularly when your goal is fat loss, it's important to align your nutrition with your training. Although everyone is different, **cutting back on your carbs about 30-50%** on rest days is ideal, while keeping protein and fat consumption the same.

5. *What If I'm Over or Under On Calories Once I Meet My Macros?*

This happens all the time and **isn't anything to worry about**. If, for example, your daily caloric goal is 1,800 calories and you hit your macros with 100 calories to spare, **don't worry about "filling in" the remaining calories**. Similarly, if you end the day slightly over your preset caloric goal, no big deal. The food options you pick naturally will impact the total calories you consume, but that varies day by day. These caloric differences **usually balance themselves out** over time when you're incorporating a variety of foods into your diet.



6. *What About Cheat Meals?*



A major perk of the IIFYM nutritional approach is that you can **eat a delicious combination of your favorite treats along with your more nutrient-dense foods**. Technically, that means you can indulge every day in a small piece of cake, slice of chocolate, or some bacon. Every once in a while, it's also okay to have a true cheat meal by **not tracking your macros** at all. You should probably **limit these "free meals" to once every few weeks** or once a month, especially if you're going for weight loss. Remember, it's all about moderation!

7. *How Much Weight Should I Be Losing (or Gaining)?*

A lot of it depends on your starting point and individual metabolism, but generally you want to strive for a change of **no more than 1% of your body weight per week**. This will ensure that, if you're trying to lose weight, you also preserve as much lean muscle as possible. If you're trying to gain lean mass, you should aim for the same 1% change in order to minimize unwanted fat gain.

If you start to plateau and aren't noticing progress, adjust your caloric intake up or down by **300 to 500 calories per day**. Generally, you want to keep your protein intake about the same and just manipulate your carbs and fat.

Conclusion

The great thing about IIFYM is it's a **completely personalized approach**. It's not like Atkins, Weight Watchers, or any of the other calorie-restricted systems that adopt a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all strategy. Although it may seem overwhelming to think about crafting your own diet, remember that **it doesn't have to be 100% perfect!** Be **honest with yourself**; do your best to track what you're consuming; and, most importantly, have fun with it. Good luck, and **don't hesitate to hit me up** with questions or if there's anything I can do to support you along the way!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dr. Eric", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.