

CALORIE AND MACRO TARGETS

By Julie Cottrell, MS, RD, LD

- ❖ **Use the information on this handout as a reference.** You do NOT have to count calories and macros as part of your plan. However, it may be helpful to at least know some ballpark targets.
- ❖ If looking through this information overwhelms you, come back to this simple goal:
Eat less carbs, prioritize protein and use fat in moderation.

CALORIES

- ❖ Calories are a unit of measurement. They measure the **potential energy** provided by a particular food. **They are not an exact measurement** - and there are other factors that will determine how much energy you actually get (or store) from that food.
- ❖ **As a general rule, 1200-1600 calories/day will result in weight loss for women; 1500-1800 calories will result in weight loss for men.** These ranges are averages; you might eat considerably more one day and considerably less another. In fact, it can be helpful to vary your intake from day to day (keep your body guessing!).
- ❖ **It's easier to keep your calories in check by eating fewer times per day.** The calories consumed at MEALS can provide more satiety this way, and snacking can be minimized.

MACRONUTRIENT #1: CARBS

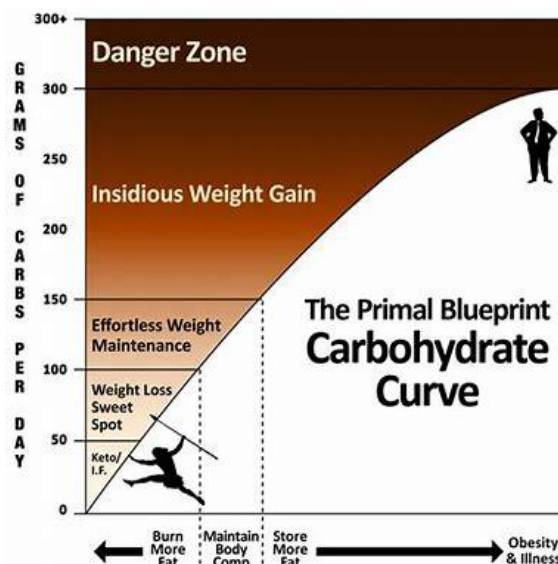
It's fine to include some carbs in your diet. But most people are eating a lot more carbs than their body can handle. This is a macronutrient that we need to put the brakes on to improve our health.

THE PRIMAL BLUEPRINT CARBOHYDRATE CURVE:

- ❖ A great visual for understanding reasonable carb ranges comes from Mark Sisson. This chart (below) can be found @ <https://www.marksdailyapple.com>.
- ❖ **Most people will find weight management easiest by keeping carbs less than 100 grams per day.**
- ❖ Low Carb Diet = less than 100 grams carbs/day; Very Low Carb (VLC) or Keto = <50 grams/day.

TRICKS FOR KEEPING CARBS <100 GRAMS/DAY:

- ❖ **Use calorie/carb tracking apps** - for those who like this much detail. See pages 2-3 of this handout.
- ❖ **Limit/avoid foods highest in carbs**, particularly ones that offer little nutrition value and/or ones that are highly processed. This includes beverages too! Several handouts are available to help you see which ones to choose vs. eat less often.
- ❖ **Use "Carb Swaps"** to enjoy flavors you crave, but with far less carbs and calories. See handout "Carbs: Choosing the Best Ones" to learn more.
- ❖ **Modify your meal pattern.** Eat just 2-3 times per day and drop the needless snacking. Also refer to the handout "Meal Pattern: Create Some Structure!" to help guide you.



MACRONUTRIENT #2: PROTEIN

- ❖ Many people eat far less protein than their body really needs.
- ❖ The RDA for protein is set at a **minimum** amount needed, **not a maximum**.
- ❖ Based on a measurement called “desirable body weight” (DBW), a good target is to get 1 gram of protein per pound DBW. We can talk about what that range would be for you.
- ❖ **As a general target, shoot for at least 90-100 grams of protein per day.** If you are eating 3 meals per day, that might be 25-30 grams per meal; and some meals may be in the 40-50 gram range.
- ❖ **For most people, eating more protein than they currently do is a step in the right direction.**

MACRONUTRIENT #3: FAT

- ❖ We should not fear dietary fat! Including a little fat in your diet can improve the flavor of the meal, will help you absorb fat-soluble nutrients, and can provide satiety (feeling of fullness or satisfaction).
- ❖ However, we don’t want to go overboard with how much we use with our food because **we want our body to burn body fat that we have already stored.** This is how we lose weight!
- ❖ Make sure the fats you use are the healthiest ones (see “Healthy Vs Unhealthy Fats” handout).
- ❖ Use a small amount of quality fats for cooking and for flavoring; some fat will also be part of the food itself (like cheese, meat, avocado, olives, etc).
- ❖ **Most people will use at least 50 grams of fat per day.** Up to 100 grams may also be reasonable. The amount you use can vary from day to day.

CALORIE TRACKING

Some people like to keep track of their food intake. While it can be tedious to do this, it does help many people stay on track and reach their goals faster. Even if you don’t do this long-term, it can be eye-opening to do this for a short time. You can log your food after every meal or at the end of the day. You can also enter what you PLAN to eat before the day gets going; this strategy may be the best one because you will have a plan that you simply need to follow, with less thinking/decision making.

TRACKING APPS:

Free (or minimally priced) tracking apps can be downloaded to your phone. Commonly used ones include:

- ❖ **MyFitnessPal** (very popular)
 - ❖ **Cronometer** (Julie’s Favorite)
- **Healthline article to help evaluate options:** [The Five Best Calorie Counter Websites and Apps.](#)

CALORIE AND MACRO TARGETS:

These apps (above) will usually set a target range for calories and macros. However, these generic goals may not be the best targets for you. If you can set your preferences to use a lower carb or keto approach, that will keep your targets in a healthier range, especially in terms of carbs. I like the Cronometer app best because it allows you to choose a lower carb or keto plan. On the following page are some examples of target ranges for calories and macros that could produce weight loss over time.

EXAMPLES OF CALORIE AND MACRONUTRIENT GOALS

Let's take a look at how many calories and macros would be provided using a few different targets. Any of these 3 examples will produce weight loss for most people. You could try each one to see how you feel.

AGGRESSIVE WEIGHT LOSS: 950 CALORIES - VERY LOW CARB/PLENTY OF PROTEIN/LOW FAT

| EXAMPLE 1 | GRAMS | CALORIES | PERCENT OF CALORIES |
|-----------|---------------|----------|---------------------|
| PROTEIN | 100 (or more) | 400 | 42% |
| CARBS | 10-25 | 40-100 | 11% |
| FATS | 50 (or less) | 450 | 47% |

This system is also known as a "**Protein Sparing Modified Fast**". Body builders use this strategy to "cut weight." It's not a good plan for every day, but may be a good option once a week to jumpstart progress.

FAST WEIGHT LOSS: 1275 CALORIES - LOW CARB/PLENTY OF PROTEIN/MODERATE FAT

| EXAMPLE 2 | GRAMS | CALORIES | PERCENT |
|-----------|---------------|----------|---------|
| PROTEIN | 100 (or more) | 400 | 31% |
| CARBS | 50 | 200 | 16% |
| FATS | 75 (or less) | 675 | 53% |

GRADUAL WEIGHT LOSS: 1520 CALORIES - MORE FLEXIBLE WITH CARBS/PLENTY OF PROTEIN/MODERATE FAT

| EXAMPLE 3 | GRAMS | CALORIES | PERCENT |
|-----------|---------------|----------|---------|
| PROTEIN | 100 (or more) | 400 | 26% |
| CARBS | 100 | 400 | 26% |
| FATS | 80 | 720 | 47% |

If you use any of these examples above as a basic template, you can still tinker with the amounts you shoot for in any of the categories. In general, use these tips:

- **Protein:** Prioritize protein. Most people need at least 70 grams daily, but more is usually better. It's fine to go over the 100 gram target too! If you are hungry and need something else to eat, protein foods are fair game! Even 150 grams is reasonable.
- **Carbs:** Foods containing carbs cause insulin levels to increase after eating them. This will block fat loss for a period of time, as the body processes these carbs. To lose weight, keep carbs and insulin lower.
- **Fats:** Fats don't cause an insulin spike but they do provide calories; and any fat you consume will have to be processed before you will burn your own body fat. It's fine to include a little more than what is listed here. But be careful not to view fat as a "free food" just because it doesn't spike insulin.

The overall goal is to get plenty of protein, minimize carbs, and use fat in moderation.

The total amount of calories to shoot for will depend on your activity level.