21-day Nutrition Challenge

Nowadays, eating well seems to be one of the biggest challenges for a big part of the population.



However, eating well is actually something natural and it is mostly about understanding what your body needs and how to provide it.

In this short guide, we're going to give you that exact insight and a 3-week challenge to dial in your nutrition.



WHAT IS FOOD, EVEN?

If we set all the fitness nutrition trends aside, we can conclude the following:

Food is the body's way to sustain its weight, as well as the healthy functioning of all systems and tissues.

Now, there are non-essential nutrients that the body can produce on its own, but there are also essential ones.

Those the body needs for optimal functioning and health, but cannot produce on its own and thus, they must be derived from food.





Essential Nutrients

As you may already know, food provides 3 main macronutrients that have a caloric value:

1. Protein (4 calories per gram)
2. Fats (9 calories per gram)
3. Carbohydrates (4 calories per gram)

Protein is built up of amino acids. There are 20 amino acids in total that the body uses, 9 of which are **essential (the body can't produce them).**

This nutrient is important, because technically, your entire body is made up of protein and it is needed to sustain the overall healthy functioning of the organism.

Fat on the other hand provides fatty acids, some of which are essential and involved in a variety of processes.

A deficit of fat may lead to hormonal disbalances, tiredness and poor nutrient absorption.

Carbohydrates are not really essential, but they are the quickest and easiest source of energy for the body to use.

For the goal of optimal workout performance, carbohydrates are a crucial aspect.

How Much Do You Need?



When we're talking macronutrients, we just can't ignore the question of daily recommended amounts.

Optimal daily **protein** intake forms at 0.6-1g of protein per pound of bodyweight.

If you're someone who's not training, 0.6g of protein per pound of bodyweight will be enough to sustain healthy functioning and high levels of satiety.

On the other hand, if you're a more active trainee that has a decent amount of muscle mass, you'd need 0.8-1g of protein per pound of bodyweight, to sustain recovery and balanced inner chemistry.



Optimal daily **fat** intake on the other hand, forms at 0.35-0.45g per pound of bodyweight.

Experiment with different amounts and see what's the amount at which you feel well-satiated but not stuffed after your meals.

Finally, **carbohydrate** intake falls at 3-7g per pound of bodyweight and usually fills up the remaining caloric intake, after protein and fats are calculated (i.e you need 2000 calories. Protein and fats provide 1200 calories and you have 800 calories remaining for carbs. 800 calories are 200g worth of carbs, because carbs have 4 calories per gram (800/4=200)



Calories In VS Calories Out

Before you jump into the 3-week challenge, you have to understand that the way you're going to approach this, depends on your goals.

You have to realize that calories in vs calories out is the most important ratio, for the goal of regulating body weight.

Your body needs a certain amount of calories each day to maintain its weight and that number is referred to as the "Total daily energy expenditure (TDEE)".

You can calculate your TDEE here - https://www.traininginthebay.com/macro-calculator/

If you **consume less** than your TDEE, you will lose weight (this is called 'eating in a caloric deficit).

If you **consume more** than your TDEE, you will gain weight (this is called 'eating in a caloric surplus').

If you **consume equal** or close to your TDEE, you will maintain weight (this is called 'eating in a caloric maintenance').

Important note

While losing weight (consuming less than TDEE), you lose both fat mass, and lean body mass (LBM).

LBM is every tissue in the body, except fat - That includes bone tissue, nerves, muscle tissue, etc.

During weight loss, the goal is to MINIMIZE loss of lean body mass, which is done in a couple ways:

1. Incorporating a moderate caloric deficit (400-500 calories per day)
2. Consuming enough protein (~1g per pound of bodyweight, per day)
3. Engaging in resistance training

Food Choices

Besides total calories and macronutrients for the day, you have to ensure that you are deriving those from quality food sources.

For the most part, animal products should be at the core of your nutrition plan, as they have the full set of essential amino and fatty acids.

If however you are plant-based, you should rely on combining different grains, legumes and beans,



as most plant products lack certain essential nutrients and need to be combined in order to compensate for those lacks.

Carbohydrates should be derived from different types of whole foods, such as:

1. Brown rice
2. White rice
3. Oats
4. Sweet potatoes
5. Wholegrain bread
6. Wholegrain pasta

These products have complex carbohydrates, which are digested gradually and provide regular energy.





THE 21-DAY CHALLENGE

The goal of this 3-week challenge is to help you set the fundamentals for successful nutrition habits.

Needless to say, this is NOT a challenge with a start and an end date - You have to make it a sustainable habit, which you can stick to in the long term, for the greater good of your body.

Days 1-7 - Determine Caloric Needs, Shop & Meal Prep

During week 1 of your challenge, the first thing you're going to do, is a proper calculation of your caloric needs, according to the goal (if you are losing weight, consume at a deficit, if you're gaining weight, consume at a surplus of ~300 calories per day)

After you've calculated your TDEE and subtracted/added calories according to the goal, it is time to calculate your macronutrients.

Again, protein is set at ~1g per lb of body weight, fat is set at ~0.45g per lb of body weight and you give the remaining calories to carbohydrates.

Food choices are your next important thing to do and as we mentioned, you should mostly rely on whole foods, instead of packaged/processed ones.

Take a calorie-calculating app like MyFitnessPal or FatSecret and try to come up with a balanced nutrition plan that provides all your daily nutrients and calories.

Finally, go grocery shopping and pick up 3-4 days worth of food, then prepare it in bulk, pack and refrigerate.

You're now ready to start taking action on your nutrition plan, without having to invest your whole time into it.

At first, it may feel a bit unusual, but through week 1, you will start feeling how this can turn into a habit.



Days 8-14 - Monitor & Adjust

The goal of this nutrition plan is to help you gain or lose weight at an adequate rate.

With the previously recommended caloric deficit & caloric surplus, you will be able to lose/gain weight, without ruining your body composition.

Nevertheless, the calculators are not 100% accurate, so during weeks 1 and 2, you have to monitor how your weight changes and add/reduce food accordingly.



Being in a deficit of ~500 calories per day, will allow you to lose roughly one pound per week.

If you are losing significantly more than that, add some food and if you're far from losing a pound per week, reduce the food.

Oppositely, with gaining, you should aim for a gain of 1-2 kilograms per month, to avoid excess fat gains.

Days 15-21 - Bring Diversity

During weeks 1 and 2, your main quest is to find out what your body needs, in terms of daily calories.

By the beginning of week 3, you should have all your calories and macronutrients down, which opens up room for you to include more types of food into your nutrition plan.

Remember that you can eat ANY food (even pizza and burgers) if your daily needs are met.

Nevertheless, you should focus on whole foods and have the balance be in favor of them, rather than pizza and burgers.

During week 3, start developing a sense of what you're eating and try to match your daily caloric/nutrient needs with a variety of foods.



TAKE HOME MESSAGE

Nutrition is functional, yet beautiful because it is a form of art and enjoyment.

The goal is not to start and finish a diet, but to develop sustainable eating habits that will provide the body what it needs.

Three weeks is the approximate time it takes for someone to develop a new habit, so just know that this is a simple health intervention you can start doing RIGHT now for your greater good.

Eat satiating, nutrient-dense foods in the right amounts, stay active and your body will come to a rock-solid composition.

Are you up for the challenge?

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