Biceps after Babies

HOW TO SET *your* MACROS

Welcome!

I'm thrilled you are ready to dive into the world of macro counting. Hopefully you've already bought yourself a scale and downloaded MyFitnessPal (MFP), and if not, those are the first steps. But now you may be thinking what's next? How do you know where to set your macro goals?

You could try an online calculator, but as you may have realized, the numbers generated by various calculators can be vastly different. How can you even know which set of macros is most accurate?

There is a better way, my friend!

I'm a big fan of the saying, **"GIVE A MAN A FISH AND YOU FEED HIM FOR A DAY; TEACH A MAN TO FISH AND YOU FEED HIM FOR A LIFETIME."**

Let's teach you how to fish, or…er…set your own macros!

Amber Brueske

BACK TO BASICS

Before we get into the nitty gritty, let's go over some basics. First, what is a calorie? A calorie is simply a standard unit of measurement used to quantify energy, especially the amount of energy contained in the foods we eat and later used by our bodies. All the foods we eat contain stored energy; any activity we perform (walking, digesting, fidgeting—everything!) burns stored energy—aka calories. Depending on what and how much you eat and how much you move, one of three basic things can happen:

1. You consume approximately the same number of calories as you burn in a day, and your weight stays the same.

2. You eat more calories than you burn; this creates a caloric surplus in your body and you gain weight. That gained weight can be either fat or, if you eat and train effectively, mostly muscle.

3. You burn more calories than you consume; this creates a caloric deficit in your body and you lose weight. That lost weight can be either mostly fat or (depending on your macro breakdown, the size of the caloric deficit, and how you train) a combination of fat and muscle.

It's important to recognize that any diet will make you lose weight (at least temporarily) as long as it creates a caloric deficit. All of the popular trendy diets with their myriad of rules work because they indirectly cause you to eat less than you burn, resulting in weight loss. For example:

- Doing more cardio = burning more calories = caloric deficit = weight loss
- Not eating after dinner = eating fewer calories = caloric deficit = weight loss
- Eating only "clean foods" = eating fewer calories = caloric deficit = weight loss
- Avoiding sugar = eating fewer calories = caloric deficit = weight loss
- Walking 10,000 steps a day = burning more calories = caloric deficit = weight loss

But the problem with losing weight by just following "food rules" like the ones previously mentioned is two-fold:

1

RESTRICTION RARELY WORKS LONG TERM

Most of us can abide by arbitrary rules for a week or two—sometimes even a month or two. However, almost everyone who attempts a restrictive diet eventually falls off the wagon. If you're constantly thinking about all the things you CAN'T eat, your mind dwells on those forbidden foods and cravings creep in. When you tell someone they can't have sugar, typically those sugar cravings just become much stronger.

2

YOU RISK ATTRIBUTING WEIGHT LOSS TO A DIET RULE RATHER THAN THE CALORIC DEFICIT CAUSED BY FOLLOWING THAT RULE

If you believe "eating clean" is causing your fat loss, what will you do when you inevitably hit a weight-loss plateau? Eat cleaner? It's important to understand that eating clean or cutting out sugar or increasing your cardio isn't directly causing the fat loss; rather, following those rules creates a caloric deficit, which is what actually makes your body burn stored fat and lose weight.

Now that we've covered some basics of calories, deficits and surpluses, and debunked some popular diet myths, let's talk about what really works and how to make your macros work for you.

SETTING YOUR MACROS

STEP 1

TRACK YOUR NORMAL INTAKE FOR 1 FULL WEEK

Be honest with yourself—and MFP; don't try to change your normal intake or leave anything out. This exercise isn't meant to induce guilt, but rather to figure out how many calories you're currently consuming. At the end of the week, divide the number of total calories you've logged by seven to find your current average caloric intake:

> Total calories / 7 = calories per day
>
> I currently eat about _____ calories per day.
>
> This is an important step. The calculations we will do in the following steps are just estimations of your calorie needs. If you find the formula(s) spits out calories that are vastly different from your current caloric intake, it's worth taking a second look and perhaps even relying on an average of the calories you currently consume as an estimation of your current Total Daily Energy Expenditure (TDEE). In addition, if there is a large difference between your current average intake and the macros you set that can be a red flag that you may need to execute a reverse diet before your body will respond to a deficit.

NOTES:

STEP 2

ESTIMATE YOUR TOTAL DAILY ENERGY EXPENDITURE (TDEE)

Getting this step right will set you up for success. Remember, in order to lose weight, you must create a caloric deficit. Once you figure out how many calories you burn in a normal day, you can adjust the number of calories you consume each day based on your body composition goals. While there are many equations you could use, I find Alan Aragon's to be the most straightforward. I have provided two equations. Use Option A if you know your current body fat percentage and Option B if you do not:

TDEE OPTION A:

LBM = _____ *x* _____ *=* _____

Current Weight *BF% in decimal form* *Fat Weight (FW)*

_____ - _____ = _____

Current Weight *FW* *Lean Body Mass (LBM) in pounds*

BMR = 11.5 x _____

Lean Body Mass (LBM) in pounds

TDEE = _____ *x* _____

BMR *Activity Multiplier*

To determine Activity Multiplier reference the table below:

ACTIVITY MULTIPLIER TABLE

Amount of Exercise	*Description*	*TDEE/Maintenance*
Sedentary	Little or No Exercise / Desk Job	TDEE = 1.2 x BMR
Lightly Active	Light Exercise / Sports 1-3 days per week	TDEE = 1.375 x BMR
Moderately Active	Moderate Exercise / Sports 3-5 days per week	TDEE = 1.55 x BMR
Very Active	Heavy Exercise / Sports 6-7 days per week	TDEE = 1.725 x BMR
Extremely Active	Very Heavy Exercise / Physical Job / Training 2x per day	TDEE = 1.9 x BMR

TDEE OPTION B:

$$TDEE = \underset{\text{Current Weight}}{\_\_\_\_\_} \times \left(\underset{\alpha}{\_\_\_} + \underset{\text{Average Number of Training Hours in a Week}}{\_\_\_\_\_} \right)$$

Fill in your "α" by choosing the number below that best matches activity level:

ACTIVITY LEVEL (α)

Woman or Less Active Person	*Man or More Active Person*
8 = Low Intensity Training	9 = Low Intensity Training
9 = Moderate Intensity Training	10 = Moderate Intensity Training
10 = High Intensity Training	11 = High Intensity Training

This equation above tends to underestimate the calorie needs of sedentary people. If you don't exercise much or at all, use the upper range of the alpha multiplier.

My Estimated TDEE is: _____

Struggling to figure out this process? Listen to Biceps After Babies Radio episode 132: The Top 5 Mistakes Made When Setting Your Own Macros

Wondering how nursing a baby plays into setting your macros? Listen to episode 21 of Biceps After Babies Radio for guidance.

NOTES:

STEP 3

SET YOUR CALORIE GOALS

IF YOUR GOAL IS TO LOSE WEIGHT (CUT)

There are three ways to create a caloric deficit: increase your movement, decrease your intake, or do a bit of both simultaneously.

A good caloric deficit restricts your diet only enough to force your body to burn stored fat but not enough to interfere with muscle recovery and growth. A severe caloric deficit may cause you to lose weight faster, but some of that lost weight will inevitably be from lean muscle mass. Instead, if you stick with a moderate caloric deficit, you'll maximize fat loss while minimizing muscle loss. I have found that a deficit around 20% is ideal; this means you'll consume about 20% fewer calories than you burn each day.

To set your total calories during a cut: Total Daily Energy Expenditure (you may also see this number called "maintenance calories") x 0.8 = Number of calories for fat loss.

_____ *x 0.8 =* _____

My TDEE *Number of Calories for Fat Loss*

IF YOUR GOAL IS TO GAIN WEIGHT (BULK)

When we're talking about intentionally gaining weight, we typically mean adding muscle to the body. If this is your goal, you must have TWO important variables in place:

1

YOU MUST LIFT WEIGHTS

Regardless of where you set your macros, if you aren't progressively overloading your body with resistance training, you won't gain muscle. Don't understand progressive overload or how to make sure it's included in your training? Check out my workshop Build Your Workouts that teaches you to build your own customized training plan that actually builds muscle.

2

YOU MUST EAT ENOUGH

People who are new to weight lifting are able to put on muscle while in a caloric deficit, but eventually everyone gets to a point where increasing daily calories slightly above maintenance levels is necessary to add more muscle. What I suggest is first maximizing your muscle gains by eating at maintenance for as long as you are able to make progress adding muscle. Only once you have maxed out those gains do I suggest moving from maintenance into a bulk.

When you first begin bulking, I recommend starting with a 5% calorie surplus and observing how your body responds over three to four weeks; then you can add or subtract calories as needed. You should aim to gain about 0.25 to 0.5 pound per week.

To set your total calories during a bulk: Total Daily Energy Expenditure (maintenance calories) x 1.05 = Number of calories for muscle gains.

_____ *x 1.05 =* _____

My TDEE *Number of Calories for Muscle Gain*

IF YOUR GOAL IS TO MAINTAIN WEIGHT

This is a beautiful place to be in your journey, and there's still plenty to learn while just maintaining your weight. In fact, if you are consistent with your nutrition and macronutrient intake while maintaining you can experience body recomposition where you simultaneously add muscle and lose fat. Body recomposition works primarily for those who are newer to weight lifting.

To set your total calories during maintenance: Total Daily Energy Expenditure (maintenance calories) = Number of calories for maintenance.

_____ = _____

My TDEE *Number of Calories for Maintenance*

NOTES:

STEP 4

SET YOUR MACROS

Once you've correctly calculated the calories for losing weight, gaining weight or maintaining, the next step is allotting those calories to the various macronutrients. The major building blocks of all foods are protein, carbohydrates, and fat. Your diet should consist of a combination of these three, and finding the ideal ratio to meet your body composition goals is what setting macros is all about.

Remember, if you want great results, it isn't enough to only count calories. Each macronutrient (protein, fats, and carbs) has its own role that should not be ignored.

> **EACH MACRONUTRIENT HAS ITS OWN ENERGY VALUE:**
>
> FAT = 9 CALS / G
> PROTEIN = 4 CALS / G
> CARBOHYDRATES = 4 CALS / G
> ALCOHOL = 7 CALS / G

You can calculate the number of calories in a food if you know the macros for that food.

For example, ½ a cup of oatmeal (40 g) contains:

- 5 g protein
- 3 g fat
- 27 g carbs

Therefore, you would set up the equation like this:

(5 g protein x 4 cals/g) = 20 cals
(3 g fat x 9 cals/g) = 27 cals
+ (27 g carbs x 4 cals/g) = 108 cals
Caloric Total: 150 cals

Now let's talk a little bit more about what each of those macros are and how you can make them work for you!

Proteins

PROTEINS ARE THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF MUSCLE. A protein is a large molecule in our foods that is made up of a chain of amino acids. Adequate protein intake helps to build muscle and also prevents muscle loss when your diet results in a calorie deficit. It satisfies appetite and staves off hunger better than fats or carbs because it helps you to feel fuller longer.

PROTEIN IS THE MOST IMPORTANT MACRONUTRIENT, since a high-protein diet is extremely effective for maintaining muscle while in a caloric deficit or adding muscle mass while in a caloric surplus. Amino acids are the building blocks of all proteins, from the proteins found in cheese to the proteins that make up the muscles in your abs. Basically, when you eat a lot of protein-rich foods, you have a bunch of amino acids floating around in your bloodstream from those dietary sources. This enables your body to use those readily available aminos for building muscle (or for other bodily functions) instead of breaking down muscles elsewhere in your body to get them.

When setting your macros for the day, aim for about **0.6 TO 1.2 GRAMS OF PROTEIN PER POUND OF CURRENT BODY WEIGHT**. Your macros will be on the lower end of that range if you have more than 30 pounds to lose.

You'll set your protein macro on the upper end of that range if you're already lean but trying to get leaner OR if you're bulking and trying to add muscle. For most people with 5 to 30 pounds to lose, it works well to set your protein at 0.8 to 1 g/lb of your current body weight. Tracking your week of normal intake will come in handy when you're establishing your daily macronutrient goals. **I DON'T CARE HOW "PERFECT" YOUR MACROS GOALS ARE—IF YOU CAN'T HIT THEM CONSISTENTLY, THEY'RE USELESS.**

Take a look at how much protein you normally eat. If you're a vegetarian or you just normally eat around 40 grams of protein per day, then setting your protein goals at something like 160 g/day is just setting yourself up for failure. If you aren't used to eating much protein, it's fine to start on the lower end of the protein range and increase over time. A great question to ask yourself: How can I start with an achievable protein goal that moves me towards optimal?

> TO SET YOUR PROTEIN MACROS:
> PROTEIN G = CURRENT BODY WEIGHT X *(0.6-1.2)
> * PICK A SPECIFIC DECIMAL BETWEEN 0.6 AND 1.2

_____ x _____ = _____

Current Weight **0.6-1.2* *Protein (grams)*

MY PROTEIN MACROS: _____ ***G***

Fats

Fats belong to a group of substances called lipids and come in liquid or solid form. All fats are combinations of saturated and/or unsaturated fatty acids. **FAT IS AN ESSENTIAL NUTRIENT THAT OUR BODIES REQUIRE TO LIVE**; it assists in vitamin absorption, hormone regulation, and brain function.

Fats get a bad rap, but they are vital for your health! A fat-free diet will trigger hormone imbalances, since fats are necessary for hormone production. For most people who want to lose weight, setting your daily fat macro as low as possible (while still consuming enough to maintain hormone regulation) is preferable. However, for someone who does no physical activity or who has hormonal issues like PCOS or thyroid disease, lower carbs and higher fat ratios typically produce better results, so consider starting at 0.3-0.35 g per pound of current body weight. For everyone else, I suggest setting your fat macros around 0.25 to 0.3 grams per pound for leaner individuals; for those who are significantly overweight, I suggest setting your fat macro as low as 0.2 grams per pound of current body weight. If you're bulking or maintaining, set your fat macros around 0.4 to 0.5 g/lb of body weight.

> TO SET YOUR FAT MACROS:
> FAT G = CURRENT BODY WEIGHT X *(0.2 - 0.5)
> * PICK A SPECIFIC DECIMAL BETWEEN 0.2 AND 0.5

_____ x _____ = _____

Current Weight **0.2-0.5* *Fat (grams)*

MY FAT MACROS: _____ ***G***

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are any of a large group of organic compounds occurring in foods and include sugars, starch, and cellulose. Carbs are stored in the liver, kidneys, and muscles as glycogen. Carbohydrates are our body's preferred quick and easy energy source.

Carbohydrates are also necessary for the production of leptin, a hormone that regulates appetite and metabolism. The rest of the calories in your diet—whether you're cutting, bulking, or maintaining—will come from carbohydrates.

TO SET YOUR CARB MACROS:

TOTAL CALORIES - [(PROTEIN MACROS X 4) + (FAT MACROS X 9)] = CALORIES DEVOTED TO CARBS

CALORIES DEVOTED TO CARBS / 4 CALS = CARB MACROS IN GRAMS

_____ - [(_____ x 4) + (_____ x 9)] = _____

Total Calories *Protein Macros* *Fat Macros* *Calories Devoted to Carbs*

_____ / 4 - = _____

Calories Devoted to Carbs *Carb Macros in Grams*

MY CARB MACROS: _____ ***G***

Remember order of operations from elementary school? You'll want to make sure you multiply your goal protein grams by 4, then multiply your goal fat grams by 9, and then take your total calories and subtract the calories from protein and fat.

QUICK REVIEW

HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR AVERAGE DAILY CALORIES

Total Calories Consumed in a Week / 7 = Average Calories Per Day

HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR TDEE IF YOU KNOW BF%

TDEE = BMR x Activity Multiplier

HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR TDEE IF YOU DON'T KNOW BF%

TDEE = Current Body Weight in Pounds x (α + Average Number of Training Hours in a Week)

HOW TO CALCULATE CALORIES IF YOU ARE CUTTING

TDEE x 0.8 = Number of Calories for Fat Loss

HOW TO CALCULATE CALORIES IF YOU ARE BULKING

TDEE x 1.05 = Number of Calories for Muscle Gains

HOW TO CALCULATE CALORIES IF YOU ARE MAINTAINING

TDEE = Number of Calories for Maintenance

EVERY MACRONUTRIENT HAS ITS OWN ENERGY VALUE

Fat = 9 cals / g
Protein = 4 cals / g
Carbohydrates = 4 cals / g
Alcohol = 7 cals / g

1

HOW TO CALCULATE PROTEIN MACROS

Protein g = current body weight x (0.6-1.2)

Starting at a higher BF%? Aim for the lower end of the range. Are you lean trying to get leaner? Aim for the higher end of the range. If you are somewhere in the middle starting with 0.8 g/lb is a great default.

2

HOW TO CALCULATE FAT MACROS

0.2 - 0.35 g/lb of current body weight for cutting

0.4 - 0.5 g/lb of current body weight for maintaining

3

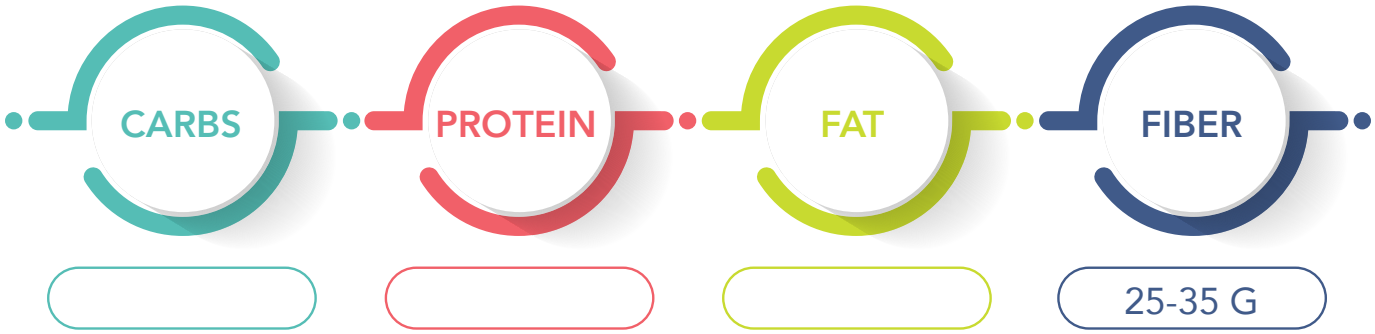
HOW TO CALCULATE CARB MACROS

Total calories - [(protein macros x 4) + (fat macros X 9)] = Calories devoted to carbs

Calories devoted to carbs / 4 cals = carb macros in grams

LET'S WRAP IT ALL UP!

MY MACROS (IN GRAMS)



Now that you have your macros set I want you to put these estimated calories and macros into action consistently for at least two full weeks. This step is vitally important as equations only give you a place to start. The only way to know that macros are actually set appropriately for you is to be consistent, monitor your progress, and adjust your numbers if/when needed to get the results you want. Remember, adherence and consistency are the most important factors when it comes to long-term weight loss. I don't care how "perfect" your macros goals are—if you can't hit them consistently, they're useless.

Last, now that you have set your macros listen to Biceps After Babies Radio episode 133: I Set My Macros...What's Next?

That's it! Now get to work!

BELIEVE IN

yourself

AND YOU

WILL BE

unstoppable