

Roots
Fitness Coaching

How To Use MyFitnessPal Effectively



We have also made a video guide available on our youtube channel

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How To Use MyFitnessPal Effectively

When you're new to tracking your calories and macronutrients, it can be a daunting prospect. The aim of this article is to help you become more accurate when using the tracking app MyFitnessPal, which is our preferred way of keeping track of your nutrition. When working with Roots, our primary aim is to make fitness and nutrition maintainable over a long period of time, we believe learning how to control your diet is essential to living a healthy lifestyle and maintaining the best physique possible.

At first you may view tracking everything you eat as a mammoth task, which should only be undertaken by professional athletes, and it is true that tracking isn't for everyone (which is why we have created our meal plan templates), however, we don't expect you to religiously track everything, forever. All we ask is that you give it a go for at least two full weeks, after that you should have a very good idea of how much you are eating, what's more is that you will be able to look at a plate of food and know which parts of your meal are which macronutrients. Once you get to this stage you will be able to eat your normal meals, without tracking them, but still know approximately how much of each macronutrient you are consuming.

Can you honestly say you will follow a meal plan or *insert random food* diet for longer than a few weeks without breaking and going off the rails? Here are twelve tips to improve your tracking:

1. Scan the product wherever possible

You can do this by pressing: add food> pressing the barcode logo in the top right of the screen> holding your phone's camera over the foods barcode*

*note: the barcode scanner is usually very accurate, but remember to check the amount you are tracking, as it will come up with a random serving size

2. When searching for a new food, input the brand name wherever possible

When possible, type in the brand name of the food, followed by what it is. This will ensure that you are selecting the correct food, with the correct nutritional information.

Eg. you are eating a tin of red kidney beans which you purchased in ASDA. If you simply search for 'kidney beans' you will get hundreds of results (just like if you typed 'dress' into google, you would get thousands of dresses and you likely won't find the one you want.), however if you search for 'ASDA red kidney beans' you are very likely to get the correct ones.

3. If you can't find the correct food item and it's something you eat regularly, add it in yourself- it only takes seconds

If you are tracking something as a one off, you can probably choose something similar to what you are eating and that will be fine. However, if you are looking for something which you eat every day or multiple times per week and you can't find it, you should add it in yourself for the sake of accuracy (don't worry, it literally takes seconds, and it saves permanently).

To add in food yourself: (example in brackets)

Add food>Create a food>Input Brand name (asda)>What the food is (red kidney beans)> serving size (100g) >Servings per container (1.3 which is 130g)

The next step is to input the calories and macronutrients (you can ignore the rest), you should always use 100g as a serving size (you can change this later), meaning you should input the carbohydrates, total fat, protein and calories in 100g of the product. Once you have done this once it is stored indefinitely, meaning you will only have to do this once!

4. Always choose food which has been inputted in grams

If you choose something like ounces (Oz) or cups which are measures of volume rather than weight, you will struggle massively with accuracy. Most products will be in the database with a gram measurement, simply scroll until you find one which is. If you can't find it it may be worth adding it yourself. Most products which have a gram measurement will allow you to change the serving size to 1g, you may then type in how many grams you are eating (for example 120g).

5. You don't need to use brand names when searching for single ingredient items

If you are searching for things like chicken breast, or apples simply type the product in, followed by 'raw'. Once you have searched, choose the product with the green tick next to it and it should have multiple measurements which will be standardised and you can use no matter where you buy it from.

Eg. Add food> apple raw> select Apple (raw)> serving size> 1 medium apple

6. Weigh food raw, then input it raw

Food tends to weigh less when cooked as it loses moisture, meaning if you weigh it once cooked you may eat more than you tracked. You could choose to weigh it once its cooked, but you can't pick and choose when to do so, pick one and stick to it. I personally prefer to weigh things raw, as it's rare that you cook food without adding other ingredients to it, such as seasonings and sauces.

7. Always track food before you eat it, not after

I have had a lot of clients make this mistake. People tend to underestimate how many calories are in food (a huge reason we advocate tracking), they will eat something high in calories, estimate that it's far less than it is, then realise later when they track it that it was far more than they had anticipated, thus going over their calories for the day. Remember, eating high calorie, tasty food is fine, so long as it helps you toward your goals, rather than hinders you. Spend five minutes at the end of each day and decide what you are going to eat the next day. Even if you only track one meal, at least you know how many calories you have left for the others. Personally I like to track my meals, leaving some calories for snacks or adjustments.

8. Build your personal database

When you first start using MyFitnessPal it is a good idea to spend ten minutes adding in some of the things you regularly eat, for example add in fruits, vegetables, cooking oils, dairy products and meats you regularly eat. After about a week you will begin to realise that you are a creature of habit and most things you eat will be stored after a week, making things far easier.

9. When eating out, use something you know if accurate

Many restaurant chains now have their food in the MyFitnessPal database, for the ones that don't use your head! If you go to a burger restaurant and you eat fries, search for McDonalds or Burger King fries, choose the size which is closest to what you are eating. If you go to an Italian restaurant and eat pepperoni pizza, search for a pizza from a chain such as Ask Italian. You won't be 100% accurate, but you at least have an idea!

10. If in doubt, guesstimate (responsibly)!

If you go to your mother-in-law's house for Sunday lunch and you don't feel like grilling her as to exactly what is in her food, simply add in the ingredients manually later on, you could even take a picture so you can estimate it later. Again, it won't be 100% accurate, then again, neither are food labels!

11. Save meals which you eat regularly

If you have inputted a few products into one meal which you think you will eat regularly, you can save them as a meal. To do so select the three dots in the bottom corner of the meal tab (lunch, for example), then select save as meal. You can then name the meal, and even add a picture of it.

Next time you eat them you can simply press: Add food>Meals tab> search for the name> select the tick to add meal to your diary

12. Change number of servings to 'decimal' rather than 'fractions'

When you add a product to your diary, click on 'number of servings' then select 'decimal'. This means you may type in your own number, rather than a fraction of what you are eating. For example:

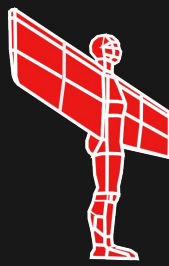
You are eating 78g of rice, if you change your serving size to 100g, then select 'number of servings' and select 'decimal' you can type in 0.78 of 100g, rather than having to select a complicated fraction, such as $\frac{78}{100}$ of 100g. This will make it more accurate and simpler to input for the future.

In summary...

MyFitnessPal isn't for everyone, it is a tool in the toolbox, not the be all and end all of nutrition. If you have an obsessive personality and you think you shouldn't track your food, then don't! Speak to your coach and we will see how we can help! If you are happy with your weight and body and you enjoy how you currently eat, then great! Keep at it and train hard!

Your diet is not, nor should it be 100% set in stone, you should enjoy what you eat, and eat what you enjoy, so long as you eat a balanced diet containing a variety of fruits, vegetables and lean proteins! This is one of the reasons the Roots approach is so successful on a long-term basis, and also the reason we don't give out restrictive meal plans that anyone can find on the internet. Remember; nutrition is far more complicated than eating broccoli, rice and chicken breast. Eating like this can have serious health implications. If you think you could have a health problem which your nutrition could improve, you should contact a registered dietician.

If you are in any doubt of how to eat towards your goals simply ask your coach, or read one of our helpful articles on nutrition. APR.



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Author

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Hi I'm Andy. I'm head coach and co-founder of Roots Fitness.

My goal is to create a private and personal training facility which is accessible and affordable to as many people as possible. A place where small groups of like minded people will receive high quality personal training sessions at a fraction of the price.

I aim to teach you how to not only achieve your fitness goals but also give you the tools required to keep them long-term.

If you are interested in learning more about a sustainable, fitter and healthier lifestyle be sure to check out our offerings at www.roots-fitness.co.uk. Or simply get in touch on Instagram or Facebook (links below).

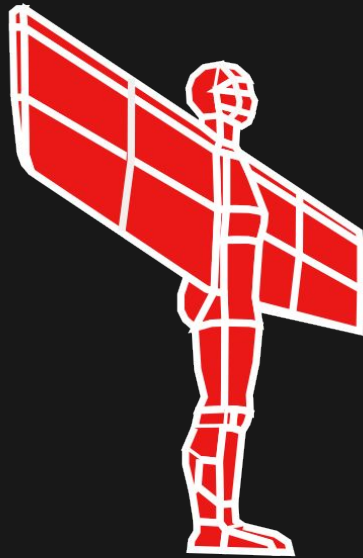


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