

Roots
Fitness Coaching

How to diet without counting calories



Your guide on how to automate your diet without counting calories and macros

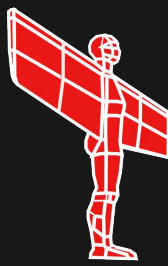
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How much do you eat?

Imagine you're sitting down for your evening meal, look at your plate: what is staring back at you? How many calories does it contain? What about protein? Fat? Carbs? If you don't know, don't worry! Most people have little-to-no knowledge on what they're consuming on a daily basis: this is why so many people are struggling to lose weight.


The aim of this article is to help you choose what to eat and how much of it. I will discuss which food groups are contained in which foods, and how to build healthy meals without the need to count calories or macronutrients (macros). Please note that I *strongly* recommend counting calories and protein for the best possible results, at least for a few weeks so you can learn for yourself how to set up a sustainable way of living which works for **you**. You can then use this guide as a tool for measuring portion size if you don't want to keep counting calories.

This article will also be of use to those who do choose to count calories/macros as you will learn how to estimate calories/macros in meals which you cannot weigh or don't have the packaging for, such as when you haven't prepared the meal yourself.

If you haven't read my eBook 'Optimising your diet for body composition' I recommend reading that to better understand the roles of calories and macronutrients within your body.

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Building a well-balanced meal

When building a healthy meal, there are a few things that must be considered: are there any fruits or vegetables, is there a good-quality protein source, is there a source of dietary fat, do you need another source of carbohydrate other than the fruit or veg, is this meal going to keep you full without going over your daily intake of calories, does it help to fulfil your macronutrient goals for the day?

To answer these questions you must first consider what your main goal is with regards to this meal. Obviously most people tend to simply eat when they become hungry. We tend to eat food that is readily available, tasty, and barring special occasions, inexpensive. There are more things to consider when your goal is improving your body!

As discussed in my eBook, protein is very important when it comes to how much muscle and fat we carry on our bodies; as such, we will prioritise protein first when creating a healthy meal, followed by choosing at least one portion of vegetables, then a portion of fat, and lastly a portion of carbohydrates. There are also extra guidelines for people with different goals, or for larger individuals.

There are many ways of estimating portion size, as with anything you will get better (and more accurate) with practice. Once you have a few methods in place you can estimate pretty much anything, within reason. This makes eating at restaurants or at a friend's house easier when on a calorie-restricted diet, which as you probably know if you have read my eBook (shameless plug) is the best way to lose body fat whilst maintaining muscle.



Getting Started

Once you've been estimating or 'eyeballing' for a while you will start coming up with your own ways of measuring your portions without actually measuring them; for example: I know that a matchbox-sized piece of cheese is approximately 30g. This allows me to estimate how many calories I'm consuming from the cheese in a given meal.

Before you start coming up with your own methods you need a starting point. The system I will be discussing is from Precision Nutrition's 'The best calorie control guide' infographic, which I would recommend printing off and keeping somewhere you can easily access it from your kitchen (perhaps stick it to the fridge door!).

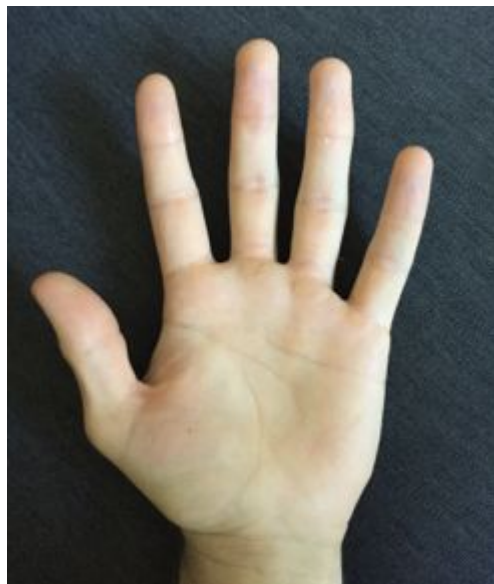
Link to infographic- <http://www.precisionnutrition.com/calorie-control-guide-infographic>

We will be using something that you carry around 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: and it's not a food scale. It's your hands! More specifically different parts of your hands: your palms for a portion of protein, fists for vegetables, thumbs for a source of fat, and a cupped hand for carbohydrates.

Obviously there are some things that are hard or impossible to measure with your hands, such as liquids. To measure liquids like milk I would recommend using a cup measurement, which is about 250ml. For more dense foods, like greek yoghurt, I would suggest half a cup or around 140g which I would suggest is a good guide for a portion size. Another simple way of measuring foods is to divide the whole package by however many portions it will give you, for example 1 500g pot of yogurt would be 4 portions.

Step 1: Protein

Step 1 for building a healthy meal is to choose a protein source, to do this we will use the palm as a guideline. Choose a piece of meat or meat substitute such as quorn or tofu that is approximately the size of your palm, 1 for women, 2 for men.



Use your palm to measure a portion of protein that yields around 25-30g!

Of course protein sources other than meat can be used, such as; Greek yoghurt, cottage cheese, milk, protein powders, eggs, meat substitute products, tofu etc. Be aware that here we are talking about lean meat and fat-free dairy products, if you choose a fattier cut of meat or a full-fat dairy product then your protein source will contain more fat, meaning you should also class your protein source as 1 serving of fat. This is also the case if using nuts or seeds. Meat substitutes and grains will also count as a serving of carbohydrate, as such you shouldn't add a portion of carbohydrate (step 4).

Step 2: Vegetables/Fruits



Vegetables are vital when creating a healthy meal: they contain fibre and are a great source of micronutrients which help to regulate many of the important functions in your body.

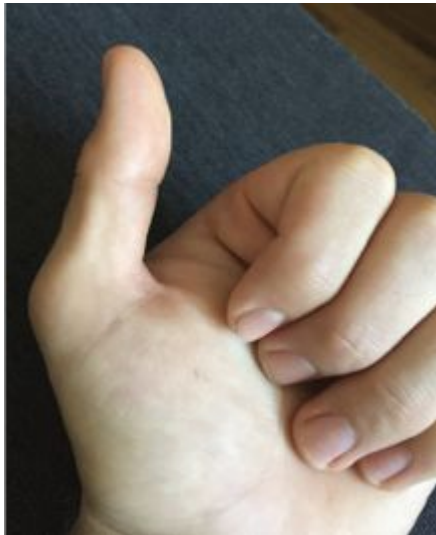
Fruit and vegetables are essential for your health, use your fist for a portion size!

Vegetables are an excellent way to pad out your meals and keep you feeling satiated for longer. They also contain very few calories, meaning you get more bang for your buck, so to speak.

Use your closed fist to determine the size of a portion. Men should choose 2 portions of veg, women should choose 1.

Try to prioritise fibrous green vegetables such as broccoli or kale, however any vegetables are fine, and variation is encouraged to ensure you are getting a wide range of vitamins and minerals. There is nothing wrong with using fresh or frozen vegetables. I always keep some veg in the freezer in case i forget to buy fresh ones. Tinned vegetables are also fine, but make sure they are in water with nothing added: this could mean more calories!

Step 3: Fats



Now that you have your protein and vegetables sorted, the next step is choosing a source of fat which includes; Oils, nuts, butters, nut-butters, seeds, creamy dressings such as mayonnaise and ranch etc.

**Use your thumb for a portion size of fat!
Bottom knuckle to tip will yield around
7-10g of fat!**

Fats are higher in calories than protein and carbohydrates (9 Kcal per gram) and as such you only get a small portion.

Stick your thumb out: from the bottom knuckle to the tip of your thumb is the size of a portion of fat. 2 for men, 1 for women. Remember: if you chose a fattier meat like lamb or duck, a full-fat dairy product, or whole eggs then you already have a portion of fat and shouldn't add another.

Note that fats are the easiest macronutrient to overeat, as often you won't even know its there. An example of this would be using oil to cook your food in: it doesn't add any volume or take up any room on your plate the way extra pasta or a portion of protein would. This is one of the main problems with eating out regularly: the chef doesn't give a shit what your macros are, they want you to enjoy a tasty meal.

Step 4: Carbohydrates



The final step when creating your meal is to choose a portion of carbohydrates or fruit. Cup your hand like in the picture, this will be your portion of carbohydrates, again 1 for women, 2 for men (I know ladies, no fair!).

Cup your hand: this will be your portion size for carbs. 1 cupped hand will yield around 20-30g carbs.

Carbohydrate sources include; grains, pulses, beans, and starches such as pasta and bread. If your protein source was a meat-substitute (think veggie sausages/burgers), beans, or a higher-protein grain such as quinoa, then you have already used up your portion of carbohydrate and should not add another.

Fruit should also be counted as carbohydrate. Whilst fruit is a healthy, nutrient-dense food containing a large amount of micronutrients, which your body will benefit greatly from: it also contains calories. This means if eaten in excess can make you gain weight, like anything else would.

For foods that cannot be measured with a cupped hand, such as apples, bananas, bread etc. a little discretion is required: 1 slice of bread= 1 portion of carbs, 1 banana= 1 portion of carbs. Just be honest with yourself: We all know that whole French baguette isn't one portion!

Step 5: Personalisation

Now that you know how to build a healthy meal, it's time to talk about how to tailor your meals to suit your body: not everyone is the same weight, size, and shape. Aside from individual differences between our bodies, we also all have varying levels of daily energy expenditure. What we mean by energy expenditure is how many calories our bodies use on a daily basis, which is affected by not only our body weight, but also by how much exercise we do, and how much we move around in general.

I know, I know, the point of this article is to make you more mindful of what you're eating *without* counting calories! The fact of the matter is this: calories are of utmost importance when looking to regulate or change how much you weigh, and your body composition (did I mention that I wrote an eBook on this subject!?).

So how can we make our meals fit alongside our individual needs, without counting calories? By following a few simple steps! The most important, is to decide how many meals you want to eat each day. Meal frequency has little significance to the layperson with regards to body composition (the total amount we eat per day, rather than when we eat is more important), however using the guidelines we have discussed, I would recommend 3 or 4 meals per day.

If this doesn't fit your lifestyle and you would prefer more or less meals, then simply ensure you are getting the correct amount of portions of each food group (protein, vegetables, fat, carbs). This means that men should be eating 6-8 portions of each food group, whilst women should eat 4-6 portions.

As mentioned earlier i strongly believe, where possible that everyone should track calories and macros for a few weeks, even when using this guide. This will open your eyes to how much you should be eating versus how much you are/were eating and how much of each macronutrient you are/were consuming.

Once you know how much to eat it is seriously easy to manage your own diet, without the need for meal plans, yo-yo diets, or cleanses! Of course there will be days you totally screw up and eat a whole takeaway and a cake, but guess what...that's okay! So long as it's once in a while!

So what if we were to compare a large, very muscular individual, who trains several times per week, to a smaller individual who does not exercise at all? Using this example, chances are there is more than a few hundred calorie difference between the two vastly different sized people and their energy demands (daily calorie needs). To allow for this some trial and error will be required. Regardless of whether your goal is to gain or lose weight, you should initially stay away from the extremes within the guidelines we have discussed. What I mean by this is to start off with 3-4 meals (or 6-8 portions per food group for men, 4-6 for women), and alter it from there depending on results. Here are a few tips to help out:

If you are:

- A larger person
- Very active or exercise often
- Trying to gain muscle mass
- Often hungry at the end of the day

If you are:

- A smaller person
- Not very active and don't exercise
- Trying to lose weight
- Often very full after meals



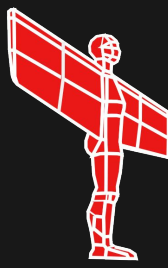
Add:

- 1 Portion of carbs or fat to meal(s) (start with 1 meal, add to others as needed)
- If you are only eating 2 or 3 meals, add another
- Or try adding a small snack, such as half a cupped handful of nuts, or 1-2 pieces of fruit



Remove:

- 1 portion of carbs or fat from meal(s) (start with 1 meal, remove from others as needed)
- If you are eating 3 or more meals, remove an entire meal



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Author

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

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

I have created 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.

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).



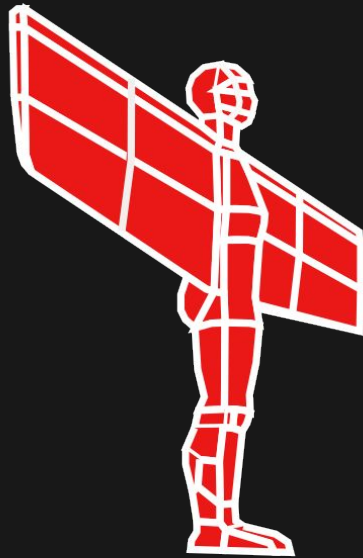
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