



UNDERSTANDING CALORIES AND MACRONUTRIENTS

Hello and thanks for taking your nutrition seriously. The following is a quick and basic summary of what macronutrients and calories are and how they are related. While this ebook will be helpful for beginners or those new to prioritizing nutrition it certainly isn't all encompassing. Nutrition is highly nuanced and infinitely complex. The information you're about to read contains some essential foundational concepts in regards to calories and macronutrients. Whether you are counting calories using an app or if you prefer a different approach, I'm confident this information will help guide you to a better understanding of some basic nutritional principles.

Calories are simply energy. That's all. They're not "good" or "bad." They are energy that is used by our body for our daily activities. If we consume more calories than we burn, over time we will gain weight because our body is storing those excess calories. Conversely if we burn more calories than we consume, then over time we will lose weight because our body must tap into its energy reserves AKA our body fat. Having some body fat is absolutely essential for optimal human health. However like with many things, in excessive amounts it can have adverse health effects. All food contains calories but where do calories come from? Macros.

Macros (short for macronutrients) are essentially what comprises or makes up our food. There are 3 macronutrients. **Proteins** which contain 4 calories per gram and are the building blocks of muscle. **Fats** which contain 9 calories per gram and help your body absorb nutrients and produce hormones. And lastly **carbohydrates** which contain 4 calories per gram (just like protein) and serve as the body's preferred energy source.

The amount of calories we consume each day is directly related to the amount of given macronutrients (or macros) we consume. I'll use myself as an example. Below, the "P" will stand for protein, the "F" will be fats, and the "C" will be carbohydrates. All 3 macros are measured in grams (g).

P - 200g 4 calories per gram (as mentioned above) equals 800 calories.

F - 75g 9 calories per gram (as mentioned above) equals 675 calories.

C - 220g 4 calories per gram (as mentioned above) equals 880 calories.

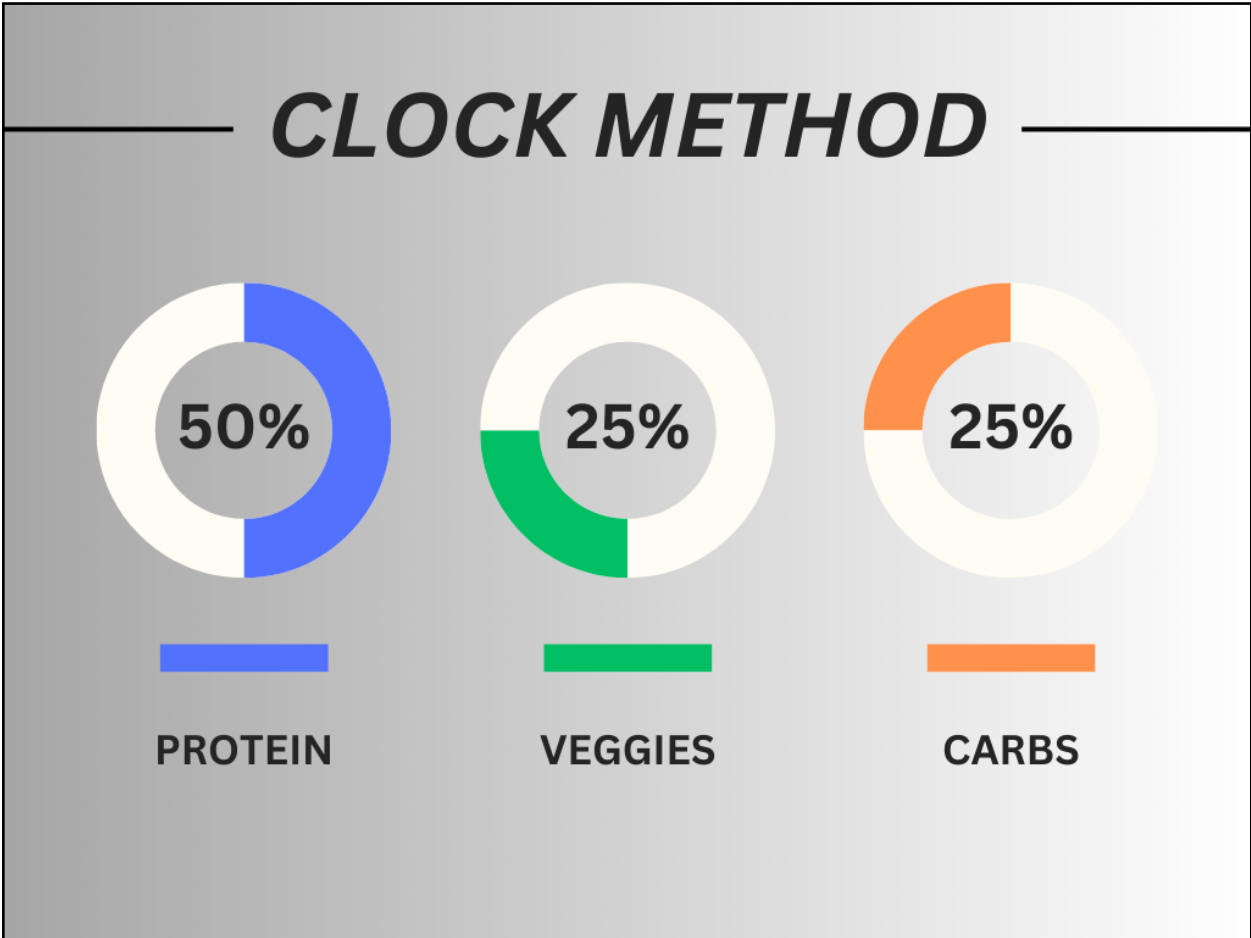
If this was my macro intake for any given day then I would have consumed a total of 2,355 calories (800 from protein, 675 from fat, 880 from carbs).

NOTE: Earlier I mentioned that all food has calories and calories come from macros. Calorie free foods and drinks are the exception here. If it has no calories then it has no macros, and if it has no macros then it has no calories. I just wanted to make that distinction.

How many calories should we be eating in any given day? There are many variables which will contribute to this. Age, activity level, strength training or not, gender, genetics, etc. There are many online calorie calculators available so that's usually a great place to start (just google tdee). When using these calculators please be a bit conservative with your activity level when they prompt you for it. Most of the time they will default to a higher than average activity level which may cause your calorie estimation to be a bit higher than it should. Last note about online calorie calculators... **they are merely a starting point. Please understand that this information is approximate and may need to be adjusted to be more specific to you. If you feel sluggish or constantly fatigued you may need to increase caloric intake. If you feel like you are not making any progress after a reasonable amount of time you may need to further reduce the calories (if your goal is weight loss).**

If you prefer to not use any sort of calorie tracking app there is another way you could still have some awareness of your macro/calorie intake. The "clock method" has been helpful for many who don't want to weigh their food and input it into an app. Although it's not as specific or precise, it does provide a way for you to have some idea of the amount of food you're eating and how you're prioritizing your macros. It's also a great tool to have if you're on vacation or if you just need a break from constantly entering information into your phone.

Essentially, you would just look at your plate like a clock. Half of your plate would be covered with protein. The remaining room on your plate would be divided into 2 quarters. Your veggies would go in one quarter and your carbs would go into another quarter (if your goal is to lose weight, you may think about eating slightly more veggies and slightly less carbs). As long as you're eating nutrient dense whole foods and staying fairly active, it is incredibly difficult to overeat using this method. I've included a graph below to help illustrate this concept.



My general recommendation for calories/macros is to make sure you're getting 0.8 to 1 gram of protein per pound of ideal body weight (for example: If I currently weigh 180 lbs. and I want to get down to 150 lbs. I would consume between 120 and 150 grams of protein per day). This is where food scales really shine as they are great for giving feedback on how much protein and other macros you've taken in. Protein is important not just for building and maintaining muscle but it also helps to keep you feeling more satiated between meals or snacks. Quite simply the more protein you eat, the less likely you are to over eat fats or carbs.

If you're eating an adequate amount of protein, you can just fill the rest of your calories in with fats and carbs. **Regardless of what social media, the news, or your neighbor would try to have you believe, there is no magical combination of carbs and fats that is optimal. It is highly subjective to the individual.** Some folks prefer more fat than carbs, others love their pasta, rice, and bread. Either way as long as you're eating enough protein and you're where you want to be calorically speaking, the fats and carbs are completely up to you. So have fun with it!

How do we put all of this together? Whether you're counting your calories or not here are a few take home points. Try to prioritize whole foods, keep your protein high (0.8 - 1g of ideal bodyweight or use the clock method from above), eat lots of fruits and vegetables, try to select carb sources that are easily digestible for you, drink plenty of water, and adjust your calorie intake as needed to achieve your goal. Here are a few examples of proteins, veggies, carbs, snacks, and hydration tips to ensure a comprehensive nutrition plan. This is just for ideas and is not necessarily limited to just what is listed below.

WELL ROUNDED NUTRITION

PROTEIN	VEGGIES	CARBS	SNACKS	HYDRATION
STEAK	RADISHES	ANY FRUIT	PLAIN GREEK YOGURT, HONEY, AND CINNAMON	AIM FOR HALF YOUR BODYWEIGHT IN OUNCES AT A MINIMUM
EGGS	COLLARDS	ANY POTATOES	STRING CHEESE AND FRUIT	CUT BACK OR REMOVE ALCOHOL
SALMON	BEETS	WHITE RICE	HIGH PROTEIN SMOOTHIE OR SHAKE	AVOID FULL SUGAR SPORTS DRINKS
CHICKEN	SPINACH	PASTA	APPLE AND NUT BUTTER	HOT TEA TO HELP CURB CRAVINGS
SHRIMP	CELERY	BREAD		
GROUND BEEF	CABBAGE	BEANS		
WHITE FISH	CARROTS	OATMEAL		

One last tip. Regardless of what nutritional goal you may have **make sure to prioritize water intake, fiber intake, and sleep.** Water intake is listed in the chart above. For adequate fiber the current recommendation is 38 grams per day for men and 25 grams per day for women. Try to ensure you're at least prioritizing a good night's sleep by stopping screen usage at least 45 min. before bedtime if possible and keeping your room cool and dark. These strategies will help keep you consistent with your nutrition because they do wonders to help you feel satiated, reduce cravings, and improve your overall health and wellness.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, or for questions about training and lifting please reach out via email or message me on my website or on social media. Don't forget to subscribe to my podcast (The Dark Horse Podcast) available on all major podcast platforms. Thank you for your choice on living a healthier life!

Brandon Gainey

Dark Horse Performance LLC

darkhorseperformance@yahoo.com

Facebook : @beadarkhorse

Instagram: darkhorse.performance



This information is not medical advice. Dark Horse Performance is not responsible for any specific dietary or medical conditions for any specific individual. If you have specific dietary or medical needs, please contact your primary care doctor.