

THE BAREBONES FITNESS NUTRITION PLAN

Nate Miyaki

A mentor of mine once said that advice doesn't have to be complicated to be effective. In fact, the simpler the advice, the more likely it will be followed. If you can't summarize your theories about fitness nutrition in less than a few minutes then either your client won't understand it, you don't really understand it, you're trying to sound too smart, or the material is so complex that it won't work in real life situations.

When I talk with people about fitness nutrition, most people just ask me to tell them the exact steps they need to take to lose fat and get in shape. They want a simple plan with simple principles. They want to know WHAT to do, and don't necessarily care about WHY they should do it. They want to get the plan, go out to the grocery store, and get started on their body transformation immediately (well, maybe have one last cheat meal or two first, then go to the grocery store and get started).

The way most nutrition books are structured, however, the practical information readers can use in their every day lives is buried beneath pages and pages of science and theory. Many fitness authors tend to focus on the "why" of fitness nutrition - why they believe athletes should eat a certain way. I get the sense that many are trying to prove the validity of their theories through complex science, while at the same time forgetting about their target audience -- fitness athletes. The problem with this approach is that the practical information the reader needs gets lost in the endless pages of scientific theory.

I've given nutrition books to clients in the past, and most quit reading before they got to the good stuff -- we're talking the ratios, food choices, and meal plans I wanted them to apply. They fell asleep through a lecture on insulin/glucagon dynamics, shut the book, and put it on the shelf to gather dust. "I'm busy Nate, I don't have time to read all of this." "It's too complicated, you need a Phd in physiology to understand it." I've seen it time and time again.

I could be mistaken, but I believe that most athletes don't care that much about the science behind human physiology. The majority of athletes don't want to sit through a Phd level lecture on protein metabolism, they just want to know how many grams of protein they should be eating so they can set up an optimum diet. In other words, fitness athletes care much more about the "what" -- what should they be eating to maximize fat loss and muscle gain?

Science is important, it gives you a knowledge base and helps you make informed decisions about what you eat. But practical information you can apply in real life is much more important to the fitness athlete. After all, this isn't the classroom; it's the gym, field, stage, or beach. If you don't do what you should be doing, it doesn't matter what you know.

Imagine for a second that you and I are new co-workers. We're hanging out in the break room or grabbing a cup of Joe at a nearby coffee shop. You've just asked me to tell you everything you need to know about fitness nutrition to get in shape by summer time. Oh yeah, you've also just realized your next meeting starts in ten minutes. You don't have time for a long, drawn out lecture with a lot of science and theory. You need practical information you can begin to follow today. You need to know what you should be doing to look good at the beach or poolside. We can talk about the reasons why you should be doing it later when we have more time. What would I say?

I know exactly what I would say, because I had this conversation in real life last week -- twice. In fact, I've had this conversation hundreds of times over the years. That's good for you, because I've worked

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out all of the “kinks” and developed the ability to effectively and efficiently convey the important points.

In this article, I would like to focus on the barebones practical steps to setting up a damn good fitness nutrition plan. This is the "what", we'll cover the "why" in future articles.

1. SET PROTEIN: Eat 1 gram of protein for every 1 pound of LEAN BODY MASS. This requires obtaining your total body weight and fat percentage. If you weigh 200lbs and are 20% body fat, then your fat mass is 40lbs. Your lean body mass is $200-40=160$ lbs. You should eat 160grams of protein per day.

- Eat mostly natural and lean proteins: Fish, shellfish, egg whites (with 1-2 yolks mixed in), skinless turkey breast, skinless chicken breast, lean cuts of red meat (eye of round, top round, sirloin), protein shakes and meal replacements.
- Avoid higher fat and processed proteins: Bacon, salami, dairy (cheese, milk, etc.), chicken thighs, turkey thighs, fattier cuts of red meat (porterhouse, t-bone, ribeye, etc.)

2. CARBOHYDRATES: If your primary goal is fat loss, eat roughly the same amount of carbohydrates as protein per day, or 1 gram of carbohydrate for every 1 pound of lean body mass. The person in our above example should eat 160 grams of carbohydrates per day. If your primary goal is building muscle, eat 1.5-2.0 grams of carbohydrate for every 1 pound of lean body mass. The person in our above example should eat 240-320grams of carbohydrate per day.

- Eat natural, unrefined starches and whole fruits as your primary carbohydrate sources: apples, oranges, berries, yams, sweet potatoes, potatoes, rice, oatmeal, quinoa.
- Avoid sugar and refined starches: soda, fruit juice, table sugar, pastries, breads, pasta, cereals, chips, crackers.
- Eat as many non-starchy vegetables as you wish, these are free foods and do not impact total calories to a significant degree: lettuce, spinach, mixed greens, broccoli, asparagus, green beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, brussel sprouts, peppers, onions, etc.

3. FATS: Eat 1/4g of fat for every 1lb of lean body mass. In the above example, this person should eat $(160g)(1/4) = 40g$ of fat per day.

- Emphasize healthy fats -- essential fatty acids/omega 3's, monounsaturated fats, and a moderate amount of saturated fats as by-product of your protein sources: fat from salmon and other fish, 1-2 whole eggs, by products of lean red meats/chicken/turkey, fish oil, olive oil, nuts, natural nut butters and oils, avocado.
- Avoid trans fats and excessive saturated fats: hydrogenated oils, processed snack foods, fried foods, whole dairy, creams, butters, fattier cuts of meat.

4. MEAL TIMING: Spread nutritional intake evenly over 5 meals/snacks a day. Totals will vary somewhat, but do your best to spread nutrients out as evenly as possible. In our example, this person should theoretically eat roughly 32g of protein, 32g of carbohydrate, and 8g of fat at each of 5 meals.

- Make sure to eat one of those meals/snacks within 45 minutes of exercising.

What about body type adjustments (for ectomorphs, endomorphs), carb cycling, nutrient timing, etc? The truth is, you need to establish a solid baseline first before you worry about any advanced techniques. Get started with this plan, develop good habits, and worry about the extras later on down the road.