



Nutrition Baby Steps



7 Steps to Nutrition Freedom

About

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"Nutrition can be either the safest and most powerful form of medicine or the slowest form of poison"

- Ann Wigmore

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To help change lives and build a strong, supportive community through health and fitness.

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Healthy Relationship

Before we begin to dissect the Nutrition Baby Steps it is important to understand that everything beyond this point is useless unless we have a healthy relationship with food. It is beyond the scope of this ebook to discuss the complexity of this issue but it is the foundation of nutrition success. Nutrition is a combination of fuel, enjoyment, and culture in our everyday lives. At its core, it is meant to enhance the quality of life not to cause stress, anxiety, guilt, and shame. It is my hope that through this ebook you gain the proper insight into how nutrition works and practical steps to take in order to achieve your goal (fat loss, recomposition, muscle gain). At any point, if these nutrition baby steps negatively affect your relationship with food then stop and seek guidance from our staff or the help of a nutrition professional. Building a healthy relationship with food is the most important nutrition step we can take.

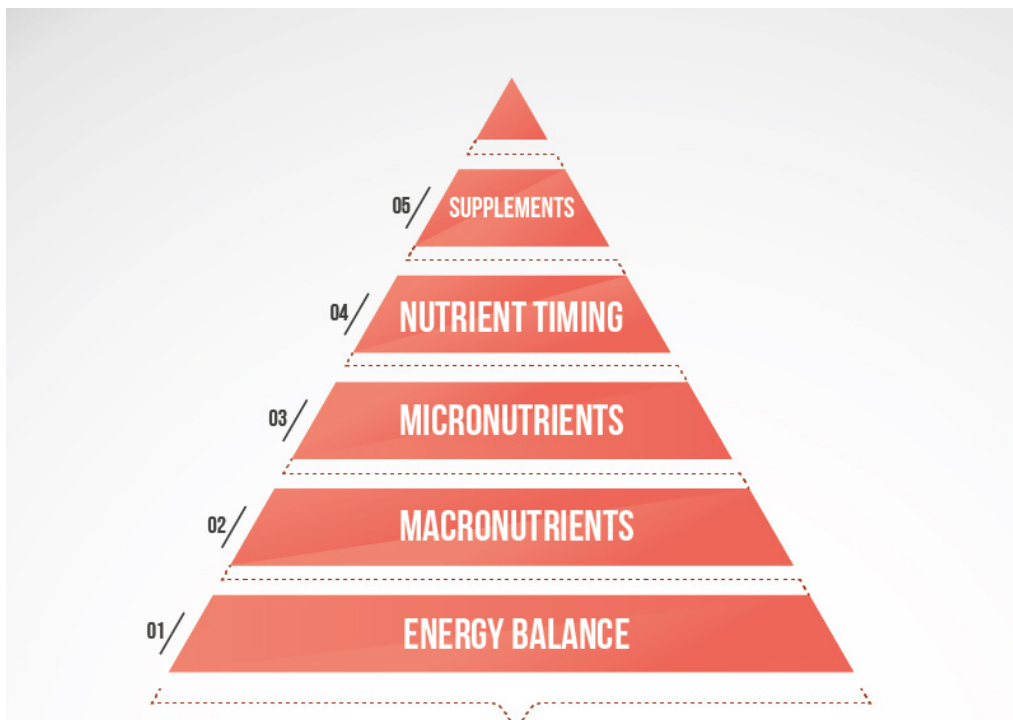
Nutrition Blueprint

Welcome to the Nutritional Blueprint. This is different from the typical nutritional programs that you might see on various sites. This doesn't provide meal plans or specific diets. Nutrition has to be flexible when it comes to creating sustainable results. Let's face it, you have a lot of other factors in your life that you have to account for. You can't be weighing every single gram of food and eating out of tupperware 6 times a day. Instead, Spark provides a different nutritional approach that gives you the best bang for your proverbial 'nutrition' buck.

If you are serious about results, then nutrition has to be prioritized. You can't out exercise a bad diet. Each nutrition protocol should differ depending on your goals and individual position. However, the principles that create the foundation will always be the same. In this blueprint, we will first discuss the foundational principles around creating nutritional momentum. If it seems a little overwhelming or dense at first just hang in there. The blueprint provides the education and structure necessary for implementing the Nutrition Baby Steps. The Nutrition Baby steps creates a user friendly vehicle in which you can apply these nutritional principles. However, I want you to understand some of the vital concepts before you starting driving! There are three primary goals that you will encounter along your wellness journey:

- Fat Loss
- Muscle Gain
- Maintenance/Recomposition

In order to achieve these results you need to simplify and organize your nutrition mindset and tactics. Nutrition momentum can be summed up in the Eric Helms Nutrition Pyramid depicted below.



BEHAVIOR AND LIFESTYLE

Every single concept in nutrition will always come back to individual behavior and lifestyle. It is your ability to mold the principle around your own unique lifestyle that will make or break your results. I will lay out some practical ways in which you can adjust each principle based on your individual factors. However, you should always be asking yourself these questions along your wellness journey.

How can I make this process more sustainable for myself without altering the principle?

How can I thrive more during this process?

How can I make this simpler?

How can I make this more enjoyable?

These serve as the basis for a successful nutritional protocol. Every principal should be ingrained within your own individual lifestyle.

ENERGY BALANCE

By far the most important concept you will need to understand in order to reach your goal. This refers to calories in versus calories out. Calories are just a way to measure energy. Quite simply, they are a unit of energy. Due to the Law of Thermodynamics calories create the foundation for transformation. Creating awareness around caloric intake will account for the majority of your results. I can't put it any other way. Calories matter! There are three different caloric levels that you need to understand.

'Caloric Maintenance'

The first step in reaching any goal is finding your caloric maintenance. This is the amount of calories that your body burns throughout the day. There are numerous equations and formulas online but most of them are not accurate. However, no matter what equation you use it will not be 100% perfect. The only way to find your true caloric maintenance level is through a lab. Furthermore, every day your caloric maintenance will be slightly different depending on tons of physiological factors. You need to let go of perfection when it comes to calculating caloric targets. To account for this, I have devised several systems that allow us to adjust and dial in caloric targets along your fitness journey. Your caloric maintenance range is the most important because it is the target we build around.

'Caloric Deficit'

If you know your caloric maintenance number and your goal is fat loss, then you need to create something called a caloric deficit. In order to lose body fat, we place ourselves in an energy (calorie) deficit. With the appropriate protocol, our bodies will tap into fat (stored energy) during this phase which allows us to lose body fat.

'Caloric Surplus'

If you know your caloric maintenance number and your goal is muscle gain, then we need to enter into something called a caloric surplus. In order to gain muscle, we place ourselves into an energy surplus. By doing this we can create additional tissue (muscle) with adequate water and training stimuli.

We will dive more in depth into these areas but I hope it's clear that your maintenance target is the key to creating results (because any goal can be calculated from this starting point). There are many online calculators and methods that claim to help find this vital information. My favorite calculator can be found at <https://tdeecalculator.net>. In my opinion this is one of the most accurate ones out there. Now let's discuss the scenarios you will come across. Use the calculator to find your estimated caloric maintenance target. For the next 2 weeks you will eat at this calorie level (allowing for a 100-200 calorie range) while weighing yourself every single day, right away in the morning before you eat or drink anything with limited clothing on. Based on this data we will see 3 scenarios.

Scenario 1: Caloric Maintenance

If the spread from your week 1 weight averages and week 2 weight averages stay roughly the same then you can assume you are in a caloric maintenance. For fat loss, subtract 500-600 calories from your caloric maintenance level. This puts you in a good position to lose fat while maintaining muscle. For recomposition, subtract 100-200 calories on your rest days and add 100-200 calories on your workout days from your caloric maintenance level. This puts you in a good position to 'redefine' your physique while staying around the same weight. For muscle gain, add 200-300 calories from your maintenance level. This puts you in a slight caloric surplus which is ideal for gaining muscle while limiting fat gain.

Scenario 2: Caloric Deficit

If the spread from your week 1 weight and week 2 weight averages decrease then you can assume you are in a caloric deficit. Lets say you are roughly eating 2200 calories but your weight dropped 1.7 pounds (from week 1 to week 2 averages). Right off the bat, you know that you are in a caloric deficit but now you have to figure out how steep that deficit is. If there are 3500 calories in a pound of fat then we know that a rate of 1 pound per week fat loss is a 3500 calorie deficit (3500 calories per week equals 1 pound of fat). From that benchmark we can figure out how steep the caloric deficit is. Using this example, we are at a 1.7 pounds rate of fat loss per week which is roughly a 2059 calorie deficit (3500 calorie deficit would put us at 2 pounds of weight loss per week).

For fat loss, use this logic and adjust calories to create a 500-600 calorie deficit (the sweet spot for fat loss). For maintenance/recomposition subtract use the logic above to create a 200-300 calorie deficit on your rest days and add 100-200 calorie surplus on your workout days. This puts you in a good position to re-define your physique while staying around the same weight. For muscle gain, create a 200-300 calorie surplus. This puts you in a slight caloric surplus which is ideal for gaining muscle while limiting fat gain.

Scenario 3: Caloric Surplus

If the spread from your week 1 weight and week 2 weight averages increase then we can assume you are in a caloric surplus. Using the same example, let's say you are roughly eating 2200 calories but your weight increased 1.6 pounds (from week 1 to week 2 averages). Right off the bat, we know that you are in a caloric surplus but now we have to figure out how steep that surplus is in order to find your caloric maintenance. If there are 3500 calories in a pound of fat then we know that a rate of 1 pound per week of weight gain is a 3500 calorie surplus (3500 calories per week equals 1 pound of fat). From that benchmark we can figure out how many calories the caloric surplus is. Using this example, we are at a 1.6 pounds rate of weight gain per week which is roughly a 2188 calorie surplus. Using this logic we know that we are 700 calories above our caloric maintenance target which puts our maintenance around 1500 calories per day. Now that we have this information we can develop our calorie approach.

For fat loss, use the logic above to create a 500-600 calorie deficit (500-600 under caloric maintenance). This puts you in a good position to lose fat while maintaining muscle. For maintenance/recomposition create a 200-300 calorie deficit on your rest days and a 100-200 calorie surplus on your workout days. This puts you in a good position to redefine your physique while staying around the same weight. For muscle gain, adjust calories to create a 200-300 calorie surplus. This puts you in a slight caloric surplus which is ideal for gaining muscle while limiting fat gain.

-Side Note-

Through this process, you will be able to figure out your caloric maintenance level. That is the key to creating the appropriate protocol for fat loss, recomposition, and/or muscle gain. However, if your caloric maintenance is around 1600 calories then that is an indication that you have metabolic adaptation. Metabolic adaptation happens from a variety of factors but essentially your metabolism has been downregulated. Instead of creating a drastic caloric deficit you will need to execute something called 'reverse dieting'. It is beyond the scope of this e-book to discuss this process. However, if you find yourself in this position please reach out to our coaching staff and/or seek the help of a nutrition professional.

MACRONUTRIENTS

Macronutrients are categorized into three categories:

- Protein
- Fats
- Carbohydrates

If calories are king, then macronutrients are queen. Like previously mentioned, calories are quite simply just a unit of measurement the same as a mile. A mile is the same distance whether you run on a road or on a beach. However, a mile on the road is a lot easier to run than a mile on the beach. This is where macronutrients come in. Creating some structure around macronutrients allows us to get to our goal much effectively and efficiently.

PROTEIN

Protein will be the most important macronutrient that you need to prioritize regardless of your goal. Protein is quite literally the building blocks of muscle. You need adequate protein intake to build and or maintain muscle mass. Among multiple other functions, protein also has the highest thermic effect of digestion. That means protein burns more calories during digestion compared to fats and carbohydrates which makes it a very useful tool for fat loss. Another key attribute to protein is the satiety factor. Protein rich foods help us keep full and satisfied throughout the day. This is extremely important for fat loss and or recomposition. The majority of literature supports adequate protein intake ranging from .7-1.2 grams per pound of bodyweight. I know this seems like a wide range but let me explain further.

.7-.8 grams per pound of bodyweight

The lower end of the range (.7) is for individuals who have higher body-fat percentages. This is also good for those who are just beginning their fitness journey or who don't have a history of eating adequate protein. If you are undereating protein and bump it up too much too fast it can have a negative effect on digestion. If this describes you then I would shoot for the .7 target and increase 10-15 grams of protein per week until you reach it! .7 or .8 is also acceptable if you are trying to gain muscle (caloric surplus). You will most likely be consuming more carbohydrates during this time period so you won't need as much protein (because carbohydrates are known as protein sparing nutrients).

.9-1.0 gram per pound of bodyweight

This target is the ideal protein range for leaner individuals regardless of the goal. This range will be more ideal for losing the last 10-15 pounds of fat or building muscle while limiting fat gain.

1.1-1.2 grams per pound of bodyweight

This target is reserved for those who are trying to reach elite levels of physique. 99% of people do not need to consume over 1.0 grams of protein per pound of bodyweight. However, if you are attempting a photoshoot, show, or want to reach elite levels of physique development you will need to consume this range during the last couple weeks leading up to the event. At this point you will probably be reaching extremely low levels of body fat and will need more protein to maintain muscle. Again, I want to reiterate that this is not necessary for 99% of the population.

* It is important to note that we now have plenty of research on high protein diets. There is no research whatsoever to support that high protein diets have a negative effect of any body function (kidney) in an otherwise healthy population.

* Fiber recommendations: 20 grams per day for women and 25-35 grams per day for men as this will increase gut health and satiety.

Protein Source Options

- Chicken
- Turkey
- Lean Beef
- Greek Yogurt
- String Cheese
- Black Bean Noodles
- Eggs
- Egg Whites
- Beef Jerky
- Protein Powder
- Protein Bars
- Protein Pancakes
- Fish
- Tuna
- Sushi
- Turkey Bacon
- Protein Milks
- Vegan Protein Products



Remember Pareto's 80/20 principle? This applies to macronutrients. Protein is most important domino to knock over first (in doing so create a huge wellness result). Personally, I only have a protein target for my macronutrient consumption (along with my calorie range target). I don't worry about tracking carbohydrates and fats because I believe it boxes you in too much (especially for high demand lifestyles). It also creates too much structure and regulations around your food intake. On the days that I'm craving carbohydrates I have the flexibility to have a higher carbohydrate intake while staying within my calorie and protein targets. On the days that I want more fat I have the ability to have more fat as long as I stay within my calorie and protein targets. As long as you are hitting your caloric target and protein target you will see phenomenal results. However, I do realize that fats and carbohydrates play extremely important roles and I want to provide some structure for you to shoot for along your journey.

FAT

Fat intake is well known for its effect on hormonal health. I won't dive into the details of mono and polyunsaturated fats because it goes away from Spark's principle of simplicity. However, variety is a powerful tool when it comes to nutrition because it helps eliminate deficiencies. Make sure you are getting a variety of different fats in your diet. Some sources include:

Fat Sources

- Oils
- Seeds
- Butters
- Avocado
- Hummus
- Animal Fats
- Cheeses

If you don't have any idea where to start with fat intake I would suggest 25% of your total calorie intake. Some people do better with more and some people do better with less. From 25%, make 10-15 gram adjustments up or down depending on your individual preference.

CARBOHYDRATES

Whatever calories are left over will be devoted towards carbohydrates. For whatever reason, carbohydrates are demonized in society. There is absolutely no research to support this in an otherwise healthy population. A large chunk of our health dilemmas come from overeating calories and ignoring food quality. With that being said, nutrition is extremely multifactorial so there are a lot of moving parts with societal health concerns. However, there is NO reason to fear carbohydrates when we are controlling calories and protein intake. Carbohydrates will help you feel better, move better, and look better! I've been in the fitness industry long enough to know that some people don't react well with a higher carbohydrate intake. I'm not saying you need tons of carbohydrates everyday but you do not need to fear them. If you react better with a lower carb intake, then hit your protein target and eat a higher fat intake. This will automatically ensure you will hit the lower end of carbohydrates assuming calories are accounted for. It is also important to note that consistent exercise will help you process carbohydrates more efficiently over time (this is known as insulin sensitivity). If you react better with a higher carb intake (or if it increases adherence) then hit your calorie and protein targets while eating more carbohydrates. Think of fats and carbohydrates as dimmer switches. You want to build the foundation around calories and protein while slightly adjusting the carbohydrates and fats to fit your preferences.

Carbohydrate Source Options

Rice
Oatmeal
Black Bean Pasta
Whole Grain Bars
Ezekiel Bread
Low Cal English Muffins
Protein Pancakes
Protein French Toast
Wraps
Quinoa
Buckwheat
Sweet Potatoes
Beans/Lentils
Berries/Low Cal Fruit

MICRONUTRIENTS

Micronutrients are categorized as vitamins and minerals. Obviously these are extremely important for internal health. If you think of your body as a car, the calories would be the engine and the macronutrients would be the gas. You need both to see progress. However, micronutrients would be the oil. It makes everything run smoothly and efficiently. You might be able to move and see progress in the short-term without oil but eventually the engine will break down. Again, instead of worrying about every little vitamin and mineral the best advice I can give is to eat variety. You don't want to stick to the same meal composition every single day. This will eventually lead to deficiencies. Along with variety, we need a system to account for food quality. Although calories are king, they don't tell the whole story. Calories create the loss/gain of tissue. Food quality is responsible for what type of tissue is lost or gained (fat or muscle).

In order to see long-term results, we need to follow 80/20. That is to say, 80% of your calories should come from natural, whole, nutrient dense, food sources (usually foods with 7 ingredients or less) while consuming at least 1 serving of fruits and/or vegetables during the day. The other 20% can come from other less advantageous foods (more processed sources and cravings). If we can stick within our calorie budget while still eating 80% natural, whole, nutrient dense, foods then we create a cushion to enjoy life and reach our goals. This 20% cushion is extremely important because it allows us to stay consistent with the 80%. Over time, the consistency of 80% will create breathtaking results. I'm not saying that you need to eat 20% of your calories from junk food every day. However, it's important to know that it's there if you need it. If you try to eat 100% 'clean' every single day, it will eventually lead to intense cravings which will compromise the consistency of the 80%. Remember both sides of

of this equation are important. 100% nutrition isn't perfection... it's prison. I want you to reframe the way you think about nutrition.

Along with micronutrients, I include water because it's so vital for any goal. There is a lot of debate around water intake but generally you want to float around bodyweight / 2 in ounces. This should be the absolute minimum and can increase depending on other factors. As a general rule of thumb increase this intake by 8-16 ounces for every 1 hour of exercise or physical activity.

Sticking to Pareto's 80/20 principle, these are the areas that I want you to focus on. Forget everything else for the time being and develop consistency with these 4 areas: behavior/lifestyle, energy balance, macronutrients, and micronutrients. This is what accounts for the majority of results. Not secret foods, secret concoctions, fat burning pills, secret exercises, or special body wraps. Anything beyond this point is only responsible for 5-10% of momentum and should only be used for elite goals and/or as a tool to increase behavior/lifestyle adherence.

SUPPLEMENTS AND NUTRIENT TIMING

For simplicity sake, we will lump the rest of the areas into one category. Let's start with nutrient timing. Nutrient timing is when you eat your meals. This has little to no effect on fat loss/ recomposition/muscle gain because what matters most is the targets (calorie, macro, micro) at the end of the day. As long as you hit your targets it doesn't matter at what time you eat or drink. With that being said, there is a benefit in terms of recovery/performance. Generally speaking, our nervous system creates two primary states. Rest and digest (parasympathetic) and fight or flight (sympathetic). Carbohydrate intake increases insulin which helps us rest and digest. Lack of carbohydrate intake allows cortisol (stress hormone) to remain elevated which keeps us alert and focused. Knowing this information will help you create appropriate nutrient timing throughout your day. During the times of the day when you want more mental clarity and cognitive focus consume fewer carbohydrates. During the times of the day when you want to rest and digest consume a higher carbohydrate intake. Another key time to implement carbohydrate intake is after exercise. Do you remember the post workout window? The window of time in which you needed to consume a protein shake within 30-60 minutes of your workout or else you lost all your results? That is completely a myth. The real reason you want to have protein and carbohydrates after your workout has more to do with your nervous system and less to do with muscle retention. Exercise is a stressor on the body and induces your sympathetic nervous system (flight or fight). Protein paired with fast acting carbohydrates (simple carbs) will get you out of the sympathetic system and into rest and digest (parasympathetic) allowing you to recover faster and better. Shoot for a 2:1 carbohydrate/protein ratio within 90 minutes of your workout for best results. The last category we will discuss in the pyramid is supplements. Supplements are only used to fill in the small cracks of your nutritional protocol and/or improve adherence. They are not meant to be the foundation. Here is my list of the supplements that are effective. You don't need anything beyond this list to reach your goals unless otherwise recommended by doctor and/or specialist.

Supplements

Protein Powders (natural ingredients; 5 or less)

Protein Bars (natural ingredients; 5 or less)

BCAA's (natural ingredients; 5 or less)

Creatine

Probiotics

Digestive Enzymes

Caffeine

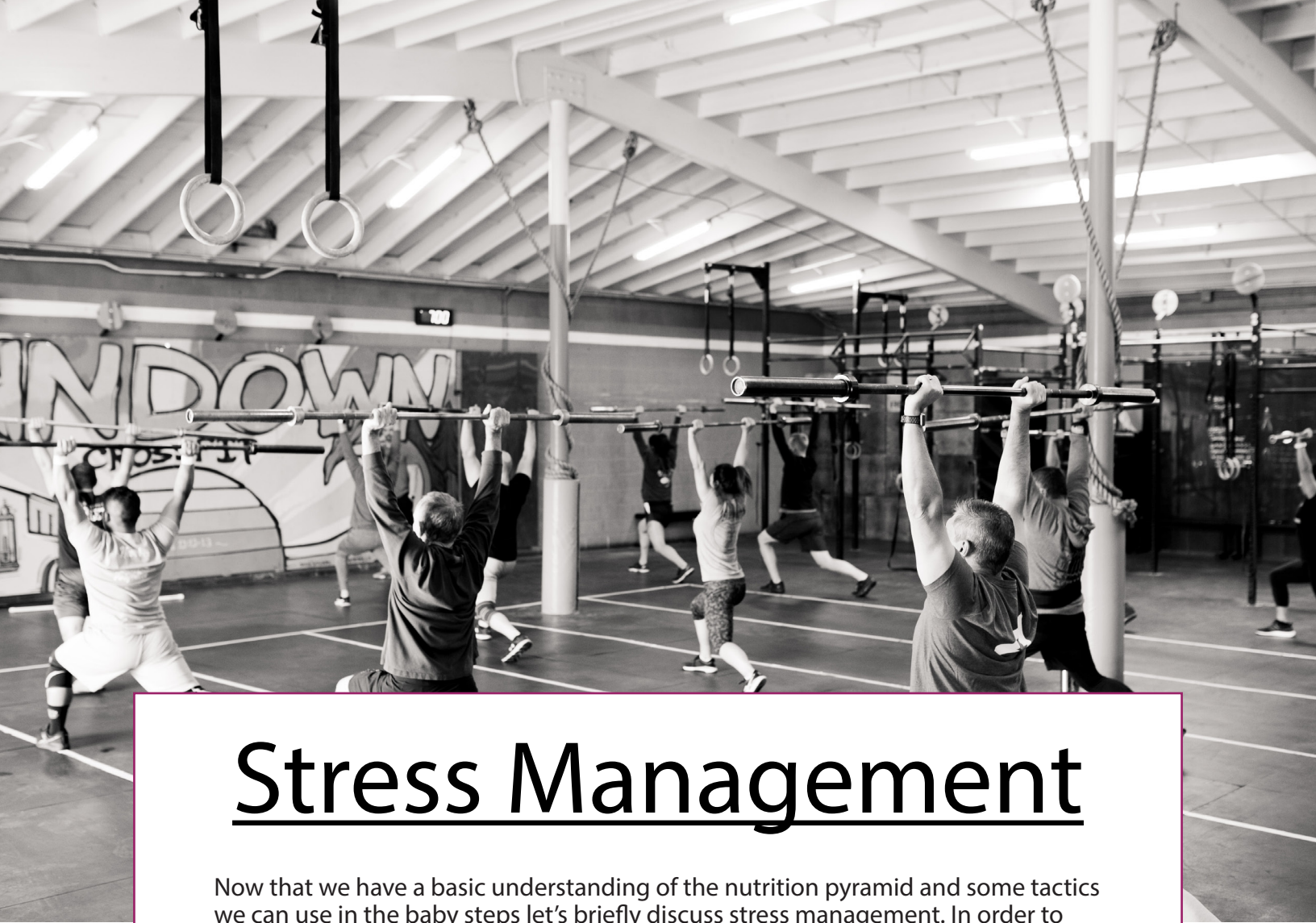
Multi-Vitamin

Fish Oil

Vitamin D

Vitamin C

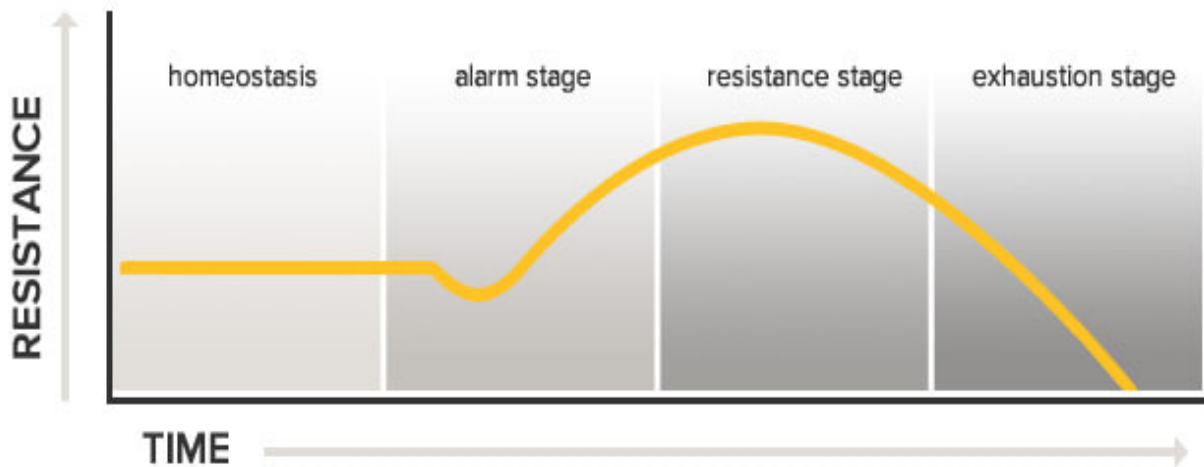
* check out labdoor.com for in-depth supplement ratings and science based information.



Stress Management

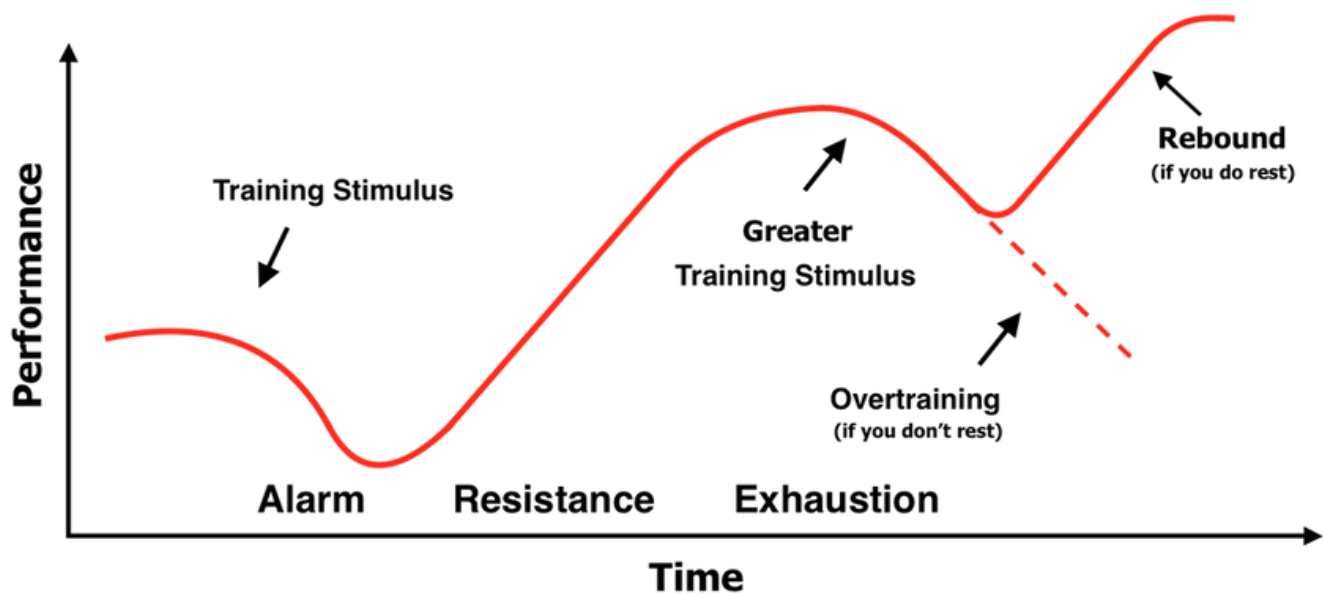
Now that we have a basic understanding of the nutrition pyramid and some tactics we can use in the baby steps let's briefly discuss stress management. In order to see long-term sustainable results we have to manage stress. We cannot eliminate stress from our lives but we can manage it and by doing so we create an optimal physiological environment for nutrition success.

Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome



The key to adaptation (fat loss, muscle gain, recomposition) is understanding the relationship between stress and recovery. For every stressor on our body we need an equal amount of recovery in order for adaptation to take place. Biological this is how our bodies are made!

Selye's adaptation model shows 4 distinct phases. Think of the Y axis as your ability to achieve your goal (resistance = adaptation). As we introduce stressors into our lives we enter the alarm and resistance stages (taking steps towards our goal). This is how our bodies adapt. However, if we don't balance out the stressors with equal amounts of recovery then we will eventually enter into the exhaustion stage. If we can introduce adequate recovery then our model will look more like this.



This is how our bodies were made to adapt. Many times people only view this model through the lens of exercise. However, the same principle applies to our nutrition. When we enter into a caloric deficit we actually place stress on our body but that's okay because we need to move away from homeostasis in order to achieve our goal. Just realize that eating less calories than our body burns (caloric deficit) is a stressor by definition! Nutrition Periodization helps to balance out some of the long-term stress which will help us continue to see results. However, it is imperative that we focus on these key aspects to provide long-term consistent recovery!

SLEEP

The next strategy places importance on the para-sympathetic nervous system. I know this seems unrealistic with high demand and fast paced lifestyles but I would be lying to you if I told you sleep didn't have an effect on fat loss. There have been ample studies to support higher rates of fat loss with adequate sleep (7+ hours per night) as opposed to sleep deprivation (<5 hours per night). My first suggestion is to re-prioritize your evening schedule. Put all the effort you can into carving out this crucial 7 hour window for sleep. Secondly, find small windows throughout your low stress/low demand days where you can implement short naps. Lastly, if you are still struggling with sleep quantity then triple down on sleep quality. Research supports dark and cold sleeping environments. Create a "wind down" hour before bed free of screens and other stimuli.

STRESS MANAGEMENT TACTICS

Along with sleep we want to utilize hand to hand combat stress management techniques. These can be considered things such as water therapy, heat therapy, epsom salt baths, essential oils, massages, stretching, yoga, sensory strategies, meditation, breathing, and/or foam rolling.

INTENTIONAL LEISURE

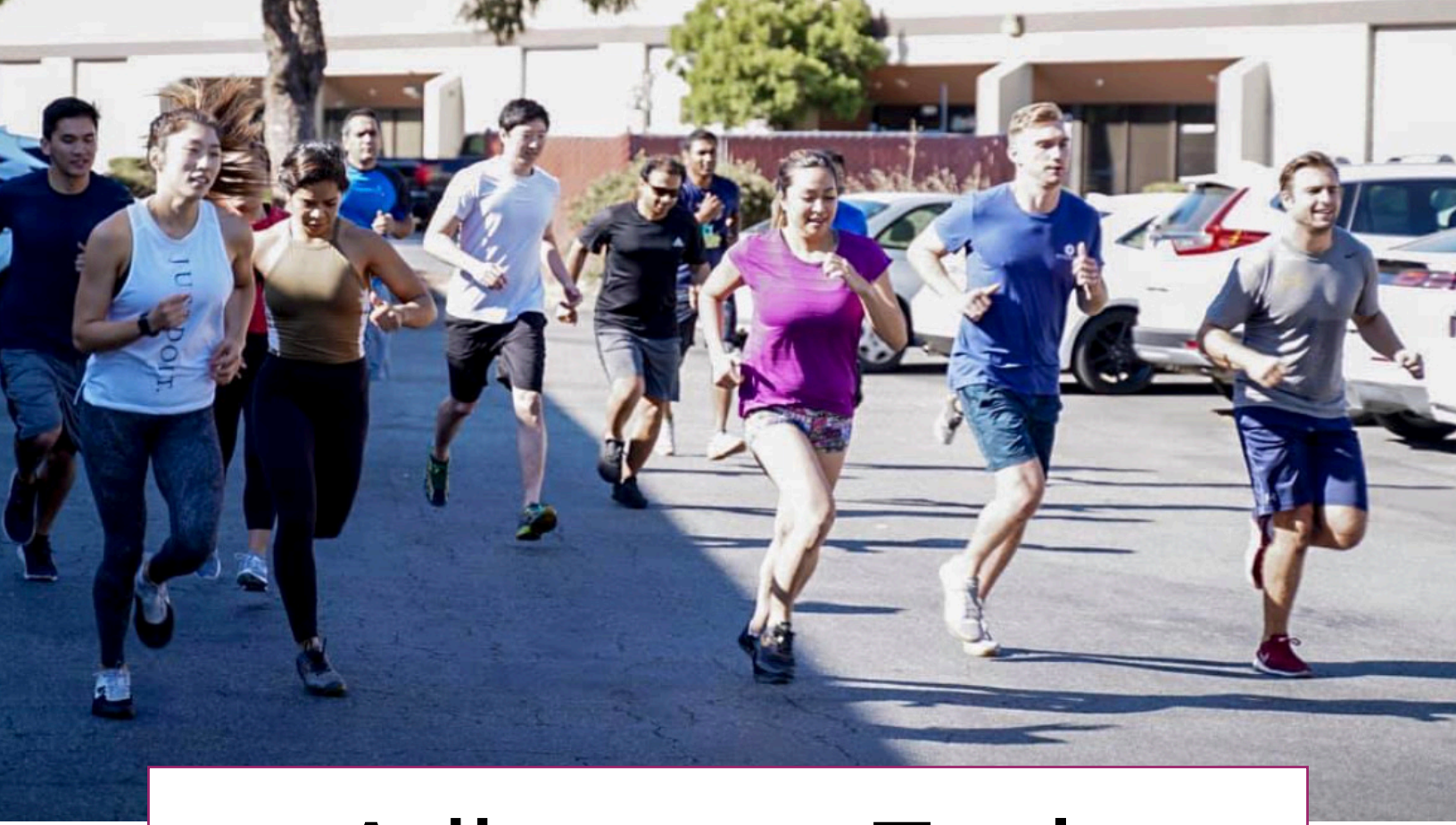
We want to make sure that we are pushing the para-sympathetic nervous system in other areas as well. Intentionally creating time for fun, leisure, relaxation, hobbies, and exploration will help to promote the rest and digest nervous system as well as decrease cortisol/stress levels. I know this sounds cliché and unrealistic (especially if you have a fast paced lifestyle) but it's so important! Try it for one month! Intentionally put leisure/relaxation time into your weekends and/or week and watch the difference. Start small! Even getting 30-60 minutes here and there will go a long ways.

GRATITUDE

After we have our foundation built on sleep, stress management, and leisure we can begin to promote recovery through other funnels. One of those being from the pre-frontal cortex! Due to the size of the amygdala, human beings can turn on the stress response by thought alone. Essentially, we can increase stress just by the thoughts we think. However, the same is true about recovery. If our thoughts can make us sick then our thoughts can also make us well. One of the most researched and proven methods for generally contentment is gratitude. Everyday make a list of 3 things that you are thankful for. Try it for 30 days. I promise you... a lot more than your fitness will change.

CELEBRATE THE WINS

Here is another pre-frontal cortex tool. It can be extremely de-motivating and stressful when you start a wellness journey because it LOOKS overwhelming. However, when we think about the process of losing fat, gaining muscle, or recomposition, it becomes very simple. We can only control our day to day actions. Everything else is out of our control. Instead of focusing on the past or the future, focus on the now. Focus on that day's journey. Celebrate the daily wins and the little things that you are doing well. This will create more momentum than you think.



Adherence Tools

Adherence tools are practical techniques to increase consistency and adherence. Remember everything you implement should be through the lens of the base principle (behavior and lifestyle portion of the pyramid). If calories, macros, and micros are the basis for results then we need to find ways to make those targets as enjoyable as humanly possible. With that being said, it can be challenging to create consistency without some practical vehicles. I want to share some of the most powerful tools I've learned and created over the past 10 years.

NUTRITIONAL PERIODIZATION

The majority of the nutritional periodization discussed here on out are tools geared towards fat loss (caloric deficit) goals. This is for a couple reasons. First, eating at maintenance and surplus is A LOT easier than consistently eating in a caloric deficit. When you enter a caloric deficit for a prolonged period of time there will be some metabolic adaptation that occurs. Metabolic adaptation is just a fancy word for your metabolism adjusting to a new set point. This isn't something to fear but rather something to embrace. These tools help minimize metabolic adaptation and provide the best hormonal position for fat loss goals. Remember this will make sense when we put it all together in the Nutrition Baby Steps. For now, just digest these concepts.

Nutritional Periodization is a way to organize the micro (day to day) to create sustainability in the macro (big picture). It's a broad term used to describe week to week and month to month nutrition strategy in order to increase adherence. The whole point of these tools is to create long-term consistency. In a perfect world we would be able to hit our targets and stick to our protocol 24/7, 365. Depending on will power reserves (yes willpower is finite and limited) some will be able to stick to the daily targets longer than others. However, there will come a point in time where this becomes mentally and/or hormonally fatiguing. Nutritional periodization allow us to keep moving forward with different caloric strategies. Nutritional periodization will:

- Create optimal hormonal health
- Keep your metabolism firing properly
- Minimize fat gain
- Minimize muscle loss
- Maximize fat loss
- Maximize muscle gain
- Create consistency/sustainability

Below are some of the most effective and common nutritional periodization strategies that I've found. Before we dive in, consider your personality type. This is something that is relatively new to the fitness scene but is extremely intriguing to me. Fitness results is 80% application and only 20% information. Your ability to apply something deals a lot more with your personality than you think. In my estimation, we have two types of people. Nerds (which is me) and free spirits. Nerds are by the book. They like systems and are very calculated. They love structure and routine. Free spirits like to go with the flow. They have this "it will all work out" mentality and don't enjoy meticulous schedules. Figure out which one you are (you may even be a combination) as this will help you dial in certain splits.

'Re-feeds'

The first periodization tool I want to share is something called a re-feed. Re-feed's are an extremely useful tool when it comes to fat loss and creating consistency. A re-feed is a day in which you eat to maintenance calories. This essentially acts as a 'refresh' and helps revitalize some hormones that get affected when we enter into a caloric deficit for a prolonged period of time. A re-feed essentially gives you a day in which you have more flexibility (and can enjoy more food). For example, let's say Saturday night is the night you enjoy going out to eat with your friends. This would be a great day to implement a re-feed because it gives you extra calories to enjoy in social settings without feeling off track. You can also implement two day re-feeds which are two back to back days in which you eat to maintenance. This has been shown to further slow down metabolic adaptation (revitalize fat loss hormones) and increase adherence (although recent research is suggesting more psychological benefits as opposed to physiological benefits). A re-feed is NOT a step back. There should be zero guilt associated with re-feeds! If you find yourself feeling guilty after a re-feed reach out to me (We need to combat this right away or else your ability to maintain and create results becomes greatly diminished)! It allows you to keep moving forward consistently. Implement re-feeds when it best fits your individual lifestyle.

'Weekly Periodization Splits'

The second periodization tool I want to share is weekly periodization splits. This essentially helps us create enjoyment and the thrive mentality throughout each week (which increases consistency long-term). The important thing to remember is you do not have to use a re-feed. Just know that it's there if you need it. This will definitely benefit 'nerds'!

- 6/1 Split: the 6/1 split is 6 consecutive days in a caloric deficit followed by 1 re-feed day.
- 5/2 Split: The 5/2 split is 5 consecutive days in a caloric deficit followed by 2 back to back re-feed days.
- 4/3 Split: The 4/3 split is 4 consecutive days in a caloric deficit followed by 3 maintenance (re-feed) days in a row.

'Monthly Periodization Splits'

The next periodization tool I want to share organizes your protocol into monthly windows. Some people do very well with monthly periodization because it allows you to have longer periods of time dedicated towards re-feeds. This is extremely useful for vacations and special events. This can be beneficial for nerds but also give more freedom to the 'free spirits' of the world.

- 3/1 Split: The 3/1 split is 3 weeks in a caloric deficit followed by a full week in maintenance (re-feeds).
- 6/2 Split: The 6/2 split is 6 weeks in caloric deficit followed by 2 full weeks at maintenance (re-feeds)
- Matador Split: The Matador split is 2 weeks in a caloric deficit followed by 2 weeks at caloric maintenance (re-feeds).

'Reactive Periodization'

Reactive periodization is effective for the "free spirits" of the world. This allows them to 'go with the flow' and build their own systems.

- Reactive Periodization: Stick to your caloric deficit the majority of the time and implement re-feed days as needed (when life gets in the way or you just feel like it).

Again, the point is to always feel like you are on track. Pick a method that works for you and/or create your own!

RESETS

The second tool I want to share is something I call a reset. No matter how disciplined and focused you are with your nutrition protocol there will be times when you can't stick to your targets within an 80/20 structure. There will be circumstances such as vacations, parties, holidays, and other situations where hitting your protocol won't be feasible. First, let's accept this and plan for it. There should be no shame, stress, and/or guilt associated with enjoying these areas of life. Instead, this should be a time to 'reset'. During these occasions only focus on 3 areas. Ensure you are hitting your water target, protein target, and eating at least 1 palm size of fruits and/or vegetables with each meal. Forget everything else. Use the extra fluctuation of calories to fuel your workouts and stay active. One reset a month won't have a long-term effect on results. Just don't weigh yourself after a reset day because the scale will lie to you. You will see big fluctuations due to sodium and carb intake.

UNLIMITED FOODS

The third tool I want to share with you is called unlimited foods. These are foods that have such a low caloric value that I consider them 'free'. That is to say you can eat these foods and not track them in your overall daily caloric intake. This will inherently help you eat more micronutrients and it will help you feel less restrictive when it comes to hitting your nutrition targets. When you lose the restriction mindset, then you can actually take steps towards building a lifestyle and not just another 'diet'. Below is a list of free foods you can implement in your diet. With that being said, these foods still contain low amounts of calories so you need some responsibility with the quantity. You can't have extremely high amounts of these foods without it affecting your caloric target. Due to its caloric and fiber composition vegetables are UNLIMITED. Don't down play sparkling beverages. These are a life saver for me. Low to no calorie drinks can help reduce cravings, keep you full, and taste amazing so you never feel like you are missing out.

'Unlimited Food Sources'

- Blueberries
- Blackberries
- Strawberries
- Raspberries
- Watermelon
- Any vegetables
- Zero calorie drinks
- Sparkling water

LOW CALORIE FOODS

The fourth tool is a distant cousin of free foods. These are foods that are counted in your daily caloric intake but provide a lot of bang for your calorie buck. If you find it difficult to stick to your caloric targets then try implementing more low calorie foods (usually 150 cal or less). Remember the goal is to make the principles as enjoyable as possible. Low calorie foods will drastically enhance your ability to stay consistent with your nutrition protocol. Explore the grocery store and play around with certain combinations of food.

PRELOADING

The fifth tool I want to discuss revolves around the day to day organizational method of calories. Both concepts are ways to strategically organize your calories in order to provide the most satisfaction. Pre-loading is a concept that I personally use as it allows me to stick to my caloric targets more consistently. Pre-loading is the method in which you intentionally push the majority of your water, protein, and micronutrients (the 80%) early on in the day. This allows you to save the majority of your carbohydrates and the 20% foods (treats) for your evenings. This strategy helps me feel on track during the day (which build momentum) and allows me to consume higher amounts of carbohydrates during the night time which helps me to rest and digest before bed. Pre-loading also helps promote moderation. When you consume treats or rich carbohydrate foods on an empty system it can be extremely difficult to know when you are full. If you already have a system full of water, micronutrients, and protein it allows you to enjoy your treats and know when you are satisfied. The majority of your cravings either come from nutrient deficiencies, boredom, or dehydration. Pre-loading allows your body to actually register what is going on.

MINDFULNESS

This strategy also builds off of overconsumption. This is another huge component of Precision Nutrition's foundation. I'll admit I wasn't a big fan of this strategy at first. I thought this concept was too 'pie in the sky' for me but it truly has the power to break plateaus. Mindfulness means becoming aware of your thoughts and feelings surrounding nutrition. Like previously mentioned, nutrition is more of an emotional process rather than a physical process. Brain chemistry, social experiences, childhood experiences, and other emotional attachments drive nutrition decisions. That's why templates and nutritional numbers don't work in of themselves. The magic is in the skill development and application of nutritional principles. Intentionally think about your meals when you are consuming them. How are you feeling? Are you full? Are you satisfied? Eat away from distractions such as work or TV and pay attention to your biofeedback signals. Creating emotional awareness around nutrition allows you to create more satisfaction and satiety. Awareness also allows you to make adjustments and see areas for improvement (you can't fix problems if you don't know where they are).

EAT SLOWLY

One of the most important aspects of mindfulness and adherence. I wanted to create a separate tactic for this one because it holds a lot of weight. You want to intentionally think about your food but you also want to develop the skill of eating slowly. This helps nutrition connect with your brain and makes everything else 100x easier to implement. I can't stress that enough!



Plateau Breakers

The last concept I want to talk about is something called plateau breakers. In baseball, they have an area called the Bullpen. It's where the team has back up pitchers warming up and staying loose in case they need to receive the pitcher during the game. If the pitcher gets in trouble, injured, or fatigued, they have a backup plan. We also have a back up plan when it comes to wellness results. We will inevitably see ups, downs, and plateaus during our journey. However, it is important to note that this is a completely normal process and shouldn't be considered discouraging. Instead, we should account for and accept this physiological truth by having systems and strategies in place to work in conjunction with our body's natural responses. Below is a list of my favorite plateau breakers to implement when results become stagnant. Don't throw in the relief pitcher in the 2nd inning. Remember that fat loss takes patience and consistency. If you can't stay patient and consistent for at least 4 weeks then you have no business throwing plateau breakers into the mix.



RE-TRACK

The main culprit is inconsistency with tracking calories. The majority of the time, our targets are the right targets but we either lack consistency, skill, or motivation to accurately hit these targets on a regular basis. Intentionally place more effort into tracking and ensure that you are actually hitting your nutrition protocol before adjusting other variables. We don't want to fix anything if it's not broken. I can't tell you how many times this simple tool has helped me personally. The extra 5 minutes of effort dedicated to intentionally tracking calories each day will exponentially outweigh the frustration that accrues with inconsistent results.

IMPLEMENT THE LIGHT SYSTEM

Another reason for plateaus is over-consuming and bingeing. To account for this we have 'the light' system. This is one of Precision Nutrition's favorite tactics. Red light foods are foods that lead to intense bingeing and cravings based on your individual palate. Keep these foods out of the house and only order these items sparingly. Yellow light foods are foods in which you can control urges the majority of the time but still really enjoy. Keep low to moderate amounts of these foods in your kitchen and opt for small packaged options. Green light foods are foods that you have no problem eating in moderation. You don't have intense cravings or binge sessions with these particular foods. Fill the majority of your kitchen with green light foods.

STAY AWAY FROM LARGE PACKAGES

This is a distant cousin of the previous strategy but it's funny how many times this strategy has worked. Ditch the large packaged food items in your kitchen such as chips, nuts, seeds, or anything that can be found in large quantities. Access to these items can lead to mindless eating and thus inconsistent calorie awareness. Instead, buy smaller packaged items so you can eat the whole package and still be satisfied without compromising caloric awareness.

COMBAT BOREDOM

In the same regard, diabolically rage against boredom. Boredom will make fat loss exponentially harder. You need to find excitement in other areas in your life outside of eating. I'm not saying that you can't enjoy and create satisfaction around your nutrition but just don't let that be the driving force. Many times sheer boredom is the sole reason for inconsistencies and plateaus. We are so bored that we hyper-analyze progress, over-consume our nutrition targets, and disrespect patience. Instead of feeding the process our boredom feeds anxiety and stress and thus decreases consistency. What you feed becomes what you get.



ADJUST TO BIO-FEEDBACK

Along the same lines, pay attention to your biofeedback levels (what your body is trying to tell you). Like previously mentioned, wellness results are 80% application and 20% information. You need to have an idea of your physical, mental, and emotional capacity in order to execute. If you are constantly stressed or have a lot of lifestyle transitions or issues happening it is almost impossible to create consistent progress without adjusting some factors. Rank these 5 categories on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the most optimal. Sleep, mood, energy, stress, and soreness. Keep track of these scores on a weekly basis. If you find yourself with consistently low scores for more than a couple weeks your body is telling you something. Usually this indicates your stimulus to recovery relationship is overwhelmed. If this is you then prioritize more self care, pick less intensive (higher calorie) periodization splits, get more sunlight, and pick less intensive exercise options. Adjusting to individual bio-feedback is absolutely the key to thriving for the rest of your life becomes stress will naturally ebb and flow.

INCREASE WATER

If you know you are hitting your targets and allowing for adequate sleep/recovery then we can begin shifting some other factors. First, make sure you are consistently hitting your water target. Once you know you are getting adequate water in your system then play around with water timing. I would encourage you to drink a small glass before and after each meal to help with satiety and ensure that you aren't confusing thirst with hunger (which actually happens a lot). This will only help increase consistency.

INCREASE LISS

LISS stands for low intensity steady state cardio. This means cardiovascular based activities that you can perform while holding a conversation. If you run into some roadblocks, start intentionally increasing low intensity cardio activities such as walking, gardening, recreation, jogging, or hiking. Sometimes our body will decrease NEAT (non exercise activity thermogenesis) during a caloric deficit to account for the lack of incoming energy. This is common especially the longer you stay in a caloric deficit but can be combated by intentionally increasing LISS. More movement is usually a good thing. Set your baseline steps at least 7,000-8,000 per day. Make this your foundation and something that you engrain into your lifestyle. Put it on autopilot. If you need some extra help busting through a plateau then I would suggest increasing steps to 9,000-10,000 per day and maintaining that activity level for a month or two.



INCREASE PROTEIN

After increasing activity, slightly increase the amount of protein you are currently eating (10-15 gram increments every 1-2 weeks) while sticking to the same caloric target (which by default will lower either carb or fat intake). The fiber and satiety from protein will help aid in breaking through plateaus by creating additional consistency with the caloric deficit. Also, protein has an incredibly high thermic effect during digestion. That means you burn more calories when you eat protein as opposed to fats and carbohydrates. This small change might be enough to create momentum and get fat loss moving again. Also, when in doubt over consume protein! Due to its chemical structure it's super hard to store excess protein as body fat. When you overeat protein, the excess calories may slow down fat loss but the protein will not be stored as fat. It will help maintain or even build lean muscle mass.

DECREASE CALORIES

However unlikely, It is possible that you might still be in a plateau after all of these plateau breakers. If that's the case then it is time to decrease calories slightly. This should be used as a last resort. If you still find yourself in a plateau then decrease calories slightly (no more than 200-300 calories). Keep this new caloric level for at least 3-4 weeks before re-assessing.

This brings us to the end of the nutritional blueprint. Nutrition is a rabbit hole in which we can spend hours discussing the science and application of nutrition. Don't let information overload stop you from practical execution! This nutritional blueprint zeros in on the most important factors involved with nutritional momentum. Now that you know this information you will understand and be more likely to execute the nutritional tactics inside of the Nutrition Baby Steps. The blueprint acts as the information and The Baby Steps provides the vehicle in which you can apply that information advantageously. You have everything you need. Now let's go execute!



Nutrition Baby Steps

Now we have education, tools, and most importantly a health relationships with food... now what? We can have the best information and structure but if we can't execute it then it doesn't mean anything. The 'magic' comes in the application of the principles. Spark provides a unique 7 step approach to creating sustainable nutritional results. This is a simplistic nutrition system that takes into account human psychology, scientific principles, and nutritional momentum in order to build real life results. This gets you to your goal and helps you thrive and sustain it for the rest of your life! Welcome to the Nutrition Baby Steps!

These steps are systemically set up for a reason. You don't skip steps when you climb a ladder so don't skip steps when you implement this nutrition system. Focus on creating consistency with each step until it becomes ingrained with your lifestyle. Furthermore, don't try and implement all 7 steps at once. You have to learn how to walk before you can run. The first several baby steps only involve addition. That is to say, they only add things into your life. The last several steps involve some level of restriction. However, by that time you will have some momentum that can help carry you through some of that inevitable adversity that comes with behavioral change. If you can follow these baby steps while pairing it with the weekly exercise program for multiple months in a row then you will see results. It's as simple as that. These baby steps are the secret pill that everyone is looking for but nobody wants to take. Read that again.

BABY STEP 1: METABOLISM RECON

'Action Step: Implement the 2 week table formula.'

The first baby step is the easiest but the it marks the turning point. This is the moment that you decide if you actually want to change. The first thing you will need to do is to fill out the two-week table found in the nutritional blueprint. Remember this is not a restrictive measure yet. You do not restrict calories or try to shoot for specific targets. You are only collecting data. Think of this step as budgeting energy (calories). For whatever reason, some people believe tracking calories isn't optimal for your mental health. They might think it's too restrictive or it doesn't allow you to enjoy life. I could argue the exact opposite. When people budget their finances they end up saving more money and feeling more at peace with their financial situation. The same thing happens when you budget calories. You give yourself the capacity to reach your goal and enjoy the foods that you love. Some structure actually leads to more freedom. If you haven't tracked calories before it will be challenging for the first couple weeks. You might have to take some extra time measuring certain foods to get an idea of the caloric value. However, once you get over the initial learning curve, tracking calories won't add more than 5-10 minutes to your day. It's an investment that will make all the difference. It is also important to note that you won't have to track calories for the rest of your life. Tracking calories for a period of time allows you to develop skills around caloric awareness. This is a skill that you can use for the rest of your life.

BABY STEP 2: UNIVERSAL HABITS

'Habit 1: drink 1/2 bodyweight in ounces of water per day'

What's nice about baby step 2 is it can be used in conjunction with baby step 1. We do not have to waste 14 days sitting there collecting data. We can use that time to create foundational habits. These baby steps are universal. That means, no matter your position, goal, or individual factors, baby step 2 is essential for your success. The first universal habit is WATER! Every single day drink at least half of your bodyweight + 10 ounces per hour of exercise in pure unadulterated water. Spend the first two weeks intentionally building this habit. After that 14 day period this habit does not go away! This stays here for life. You have to make this a LIFE-LONG habit. It's the key for sustaining and continuing to build upon your results. Spend the initial two-week period exploring systems that help you do this effortlessly. For me, I drink water directly upon waking. This helps me start the day off with a win and creates momentum as I move into the lunch and dinner time hours. Find a system that works for you and stick with it. This is the common trait among people that find wellness success. If you want to be rich, stick to habits that wealthy people have. If you want to be a better runner, emulate traits that effective runners have. If you want to be healthy, you need to create habits that healthy people have!

'Habit 2: eat 2 fist sized portions of vegetables or fruits everyday.'



The second universal habit is usually the hardest for most people. But it's the absolute key to sustainability. If you don't develop this you will lose the ability to sustain and thrive off of your goal. Micronutrients are vitamins and minerals, which basically mean fruits and vegetables. Eat at least one fist sized portion of fruits or vegetables with or at the beginning of each meal. Spend the first two weeks intentionally building this habit (spark table length). After 14 days, this does not go away! Again, this stays here for life. You NEED to keep executing this tactic. Consistently pumping micronutrients in your system during the day helps eliminate and/or decrease nighttime cravings. Again, during those initial 14 days, find a systemic way to incorporate this step into to your individual lifestyle. This one will be a game-changer if you can weave it in there and keep it.

'Habit 3: consume at least 2 palm sized protein sources at each meal'



The last universal habit is also crucial because it creates a much needed awareness for the majority of people. Most people under consume protein and over consume calories. This works against any body composition, performance, and/or longevity goal that you have. For men, make sure you eat at least 2 palm sized portions or at least 30 grams of protein at each meal. For women, make sure you eat at least 1 palm sized portion or at least 20 grams of protein at each meal. Spend the first two weeks intentionally building this habit (spark table length). Again, after 14 days, this does not go away. It only gets dialed in during the next baby step. For me, I preload protein early in the day. I make sure my first couple meals have higher amounts of protein. I found out that I am more likely to eat highly processed foods throughout the day when I don't start my mornings with water, micros, and protein. This helps me feel on track and allows me more room for 'treat' foods, usually higher in carbohydrates, at night time which helps me sleep and relax.

You need to engrain water, micros, and protein into your DNA. You need to make these LIFELONG habits because habits will not ebb and flow. They don't disappear during the holidays, vacations, and when life gets in the way. They are consistent and that's the key to creating sustainability and ultimately the Thrive lifestyle. These are addition habits. They only add things into your life (no restriction). That means there's no excuse not to execute them everyday.

*Side Note: Consider sticking to the "5 S's" for 80% of your food structure. The 5 S's are: Soups, Salads, Stirfrys, Scambles, and Smoothies. That is to say, make the majority of your meals into this structure. The 5 S's are effective structures because they allow you to include plenty of micronutrients and protein in the equation. Each S has multiple variations and combinations which will ensure variety and limit nutrient deficiencies. Lastly, if you can account for low calories sauces, liquids, and other additives then these are high volume food structures with relatively low amounts of calories. Just something to consider!

BABY STEP 3: CALORIC TARGETS AND PERIODIZATION

Action Step: Implement calorie and protein targets

This step helps develop the skill of caloric awareness. After the first two weeks you will have successfully filled out the spark table and implemented the universal habits (water, micros, and protein). Now we can use our data to create caloric targets. This also marks the turning point of addition into subtraction. The first layer of baby steps only add things into your diet. This helps build momentum inside of your bodily systems but also build psychological momentum. Now we see some level of restriction for the first time. This will require some more effort but it will make ALL the difference. Take your two week table and follow the steps discussed in the energy balance chapter. Use this method to find your caloric target range. Once you have your caloric target range, refer to the protein chapter and calculate your protein target range (at least .7 grams of protein per pound of bodyweight). At this point you should have a calorie and a protein target range to hit everyday.

BABY STEP 4: STRESS MANAGEMENT

Action Step: Implement stress management techniques.

After you implement your calorie targets re-read the stress management chapter and sprinkle in some intentional stress management techniques.

BABY STEP 5: PLATEAU BREAKERS

Action Step: Implement plateau breakers as needed.

Baby step 5 acts as a dial switch. We have all the most powerful principles working for us at this point in time. At the end of the 4 week periodization plan use the adherence tools, adjustment protocols and plateau breakers found in the nutritional blueprint. If it feels unsustainable, add some adherence tools in right away. If your progress doesn't fall into the "sweet spots" make adjustments as needed. You can also start implementing a few of the plateau breakers starting from top to bottom. Once you've made some changes, take another 4 weeks to allow consistency and the adjustments to play out. After 4 weeks, use the same process (adherence tools, adjustments, and plateau breakers) to dial things in if needed. Rinse and repeat until you reach your goal!

So you reached your goal... now what? This is what most programs fail to talk about...the diet after the diet. The game plan to sustain and thrive off of your goal for the rest of your life. Through proper exercise and nutrition we can reach this goal in a sustainable manner with advantageous hormonal, mental, and physiological levels. We are in a position to sustain, thrive, and improve. However, there needs to be a slight transition. The Nutrition Baby Steps allows us to develop important skills while creating results. The Thrive Transition puts those skills into practice. I'm going to walk you through the last couple baby steps. These are intended to help you sustain, thrive, and improve upon your goal. There is no such thing as a finish line. That's the beautiful thing about wellness. We can always continue to build, adapt, and transform.

BABY STEP 6: DEVELOP MAINTENANCE

Action Step 1: identify ceiling & floor

Once you've reach your goal the first thing I would do is create an outline. The goal here is to pick a weight range that you can THRIVE in. I'd suggest picking a 5-10 pound weight range that you feel best at. Take into account, how you move, how you feel (biofeedback, hormones, emotional) and how you look. Mark the ceiling (the highest weight that you feel comfortable at) and mark the floor (the lowest weight that you feel comfortable at). Make sure this range supports all three areas (longevity, movement, and looks). You don't want to pick a super low weight range for the sake of looking amazing year round at the detriment of excessive restriction and poor biofeedback. It's wise to create objective data points that can help steer you as we start to transition into less nutrition structure. Make sure you actually stay within these boarders. Weigh yourself 3-5x per month (on consecutively days) and record the average of those weigh ins (more on this in step 2). That is your actual marker. If we start to sway towards the ceiling then we know to we need to dial it back a bit. If we start getting close to our floor then we know that sustainability might become an issue in the near future and we can increase calories if desired.

*Side Note: If you are like me then my ceiling is usually 5 pounds higher than I want it to be. I tried picking a ceiling that mainly focuses on aesthetics but in reality, 5 pounds heavier puts me in a position to experience longevity and movement benefits to a higher degree. Be smart with your outline! You'll know.

Why create this range?

First, this is a great way to let go of perfection and live life. You have a range! Not an exact number. You can fluctuate. You can overeat some days and under-eat other days and not have to micro-analyze your metabolism. Looking back at my journey, I wish I would have created this outline many years ago. This will help you stay accountable and combat the "lose 20 pounds to end up gaining 30 pounds pitfall".

Secondly, it gives you room to recompose (lose fat; gain muscle). You can float within this outline and still continue to look better, feel better, and move better. During the winter months you can shift towards your ceiling and enjoy the holidays. During the summer months you can shift towards your floor and enjoy the sun. Or vice versa... or create any year long strategy that you want. It's these fluctuations that will improve overall longevity, physique, and movement because your metabolism/hormonal system will not down-regulate.

'Action Step 2: find maintenance calories and stay there for at least 2 months'

After you've established your outline, we have to learn how to stay within those borders. You **HAVE TO** learn maintenance. This is not optional. I care about you and I want you to sustain, build, and thrive upon all your hard work! Maintenance is the key. Once you reach your goal it can be easy to take your foot off the gas pedal. It can be extremely easy to get relaxed. During your transformation you've probably experienced a lot of frustration and emotions. After you finish a transformation it can be easy to release your ambitions to the wind and lose sight of sustaining the end product. It's important to remember that maintenance still requires some will power. You can be **MORE** relaxed but you can't **COMPLETELY** relax. The goal is to stay within your outline for the rest of your life **OR** at least 2 months if you decide you want to go after another goal. Here is the maintenance process to follow.

- Step 1: Once you reach your goal, you can immediately adjust calories (200-300 calories max). Increase calories if you were in a caloric deficit and subtract calories if you were in a caloric surplus.
- Step 2: Eat this quantity for at least 2 weeks allowing for fluctuations to occur. Use these extra calories to fuel your training and enjoy social events, outings, and other food experiences. Pay attention to how you feel.
- Step 3: After 2 weeks, you can **SLIGHTLY** adjust calories if needed (100-200 calories max). Increase calories if you were in a caloric deficit and subtract calories if you were in a caloric surplus.
- Step 4: If you feel satisfied and weight is somewhat steady (1-4 pound fluctuation). Then stay at this calorie range! Satisfaction and weight consistency suggests you are around maintenance. You just have to understand what that feels like. You shouldn't feel **DEPRIVED** but you shouldn't feel stuffed either. If you still feel deprived at this point in time then repeat step 3 one more time. Use the adjustment protocol below during this process.

-Side Note-

During this maintenance process your weight **WILL** fluctuate. That's okay. However, you should stay within your 5-10 pound outline (ceiling and floor). You need to be patient when reintroducing new caloric levels. You have to allow your metabolism to adjust to new intake. That's why we only pay attention to the average weight trend. **DO NOT** weigh yourself inconsistently and think those data points are truth. Average weight allows us to see past the fluctuates and where our metabolism is at. The goal is to get calories as high as possible while staying within your 5-10 pound weight range. It's also a wise idea to track biofeedback a week out of the month. This gives you an idea of maintenance as well.

BABY STEP 7: THRIVE!

'Action Step 1: Weak off of caloric tracking and develop intuitive eating'

- Track calories every OTHER DAY

At this point you should be pretty good at tracking calories and have a general idea of your daily meal structures and rhythm. The next step is to practice the skill of caloric awareness. Just like any skill, we have to put it into practice in order to refine and develop it. Track your calories and protein every OTHER day. On the days that you don't track, use similar meal structures as the tracking days. The goal with step 3 is to let go of NEEDED to track calories and trust yourself to INTUITIVELY TARGET (get in the ball park). This is not intuitive eating. This does not mean just listen to your body and eat how you want. Somedays you will be really stressed and will want to eat tons of junk food. That's why I don't believe in intuitive eating. I coined this term called INTUITVELY TARGETING. This means to trust the skills, habits, and tactics that you've develop in the baby steps and emulate them without actually tracking. This allows you to let go of perfection and accept fluctuations while enjoying life. Somedays you will overshoot and that's okay. This is why we use this strategy during a maintenance period because we WANT to have fluctuations. This helps drive exercise progress and allows us to continue to recompose our physique (lose fat, gain muscle). while staying within our outline (ceiling and floor). We DO NOT want perfection, we want fluctuation.

*Side Note: This is a great time to practice eating at restaurants without tracking. Pick similar meal structures to your regular meals but enjoy different variations and combinations. For example, if you primarily have stir-frys (meat with rice and veggies) then you could select a burger and substitute the fries with a side of rice or baked potato. This would mimic a 'remixed stir fry'. The burger takes place of the meat, the bun acts as another source of carb, and the rest of the meal would look like something you eat on a regular basis. You might have some extra fat and carb intake from the burger and bun but it gets you in the ball park and that's the goal with "intuitive targeting".

- Track Calories 1 day per week

After you implement tracking every other for at least 1 month you can move onto reaction tracking. This is our end goal. Reactive tracking is picking 1 day per week to track calories/protein and compare it to the other days of "Intuitive Targeting". Don't pre-determine your tracking day. Just reactively choose it when life allows for it. Just think of this step as the oil in a car. It just makes sure everything is running smoothly. Or you can think of reactive tracking as the wandering high school principle checking in on students moving from classroom to classroom. It's just there to make sure you are focused. It can identify if you are over consuming certain foods, overshooting portion sizes, and/or under consuming protein. Continue this process for the rest of your life. It's just one day a week!

*Side Note: If you enjoy tracking you can implement more reactive tracking days inside of your week. It can ebb and flow with your personal preference. I do think there is value in only tracking 1 day a week for at least a period of time because it forces you to 'let go' of needing to track while still having some level of caloric comparison. In the same manner, if you miss a week or two from tracking that's totally okay. The main goal is to shift away from tracking calories and towards intuitive targeting.



'Action Step 2: Float'

By this point in time, you've created your outline (ceiling and floor), you've found your maintenance level, you've embedded the water/micronutrients/protein baby steps into your DNA, and you've weaned off caloric tracking... eventually making your way towards reactive tracking. The last phase is to use the strategy of reactive targeting to float up and down through our weight range (ceiling and floor) throughout the year. Look at your lifestyle from a year viewpoint. During the holiday months or during times of the year where you utilize vacations intentionally float towards your ceiling. Use this as an opportunity to enjoy more calories, fuel training, and build lean muscle mass. During the times of the year that you are more stagnant or want to look leaner (summer months for example). Float towards your floor. Use this time to stay diligent and focused with your nutrition. Lastly, set aside a couple months out of the year to focus on creating your sweet spot (the spot in the middle of your floor and ceiling). The secret lies in your ability to float between these set points. This allows you to flow with life and not be constantly working against it. The weight range acts as an accountability framework and always keeps you within arm reach of aesthetic, longevity, and performance capabilities. This approach creates the thrive lifestyle. The thrive lifestyle will:

- Most importantly, create FREEDOM!
- Allow you to look, feel, and move well throughout the year in a sustainable manner.
- Prime metabolism and hormones for an optimal recomposition environment.
- Allow you to enjoy life, vacations, holidays, and special occasions without sacrificing your fitness goals.
- Normalize calorie, exercise, and stress fluctuations.
- Allow life to ebb and flow.

There you have it! The 7 baby steps to nutritional freedom!



Closing

Nutrition is a multi-dimensional topic. There are a lot of factors that affect metabolism, gut health, nutrient absorption, and emotional eating. It can be a daunting task to embark on a nutrition journey because of the mass amount of information. It is my hope that these baby steps simplify the process and encourage you that sustainable results are possible! These phases paired with simple and practical habits will create sustainable long-lasting results. These steps help create awareness, skills, and tools that have the capacity to drastically enhance quality of life (not to mention help you surpass your goals). The goal isn't to track metrics every day for the rest of your life. The goal is to create habits around key nutritional principles and track for periods of time help develop and refine those skills. I am so honored and humbled to be on this journey with you!

Forever in your corner,

