



# THE NASM GUIDE TO CALORIE COUNTING



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## Disclaimer

The content in this guide is intended to be used for informational purposes only. It is not to be used to diagnose or treat any medical condition or disease, and not to replace guidance from a licensed healthcare provider.

# Welcome!

We are excited that you are interested in taking this journey with us today. We are going to be learning all about calorie counting, a highly effective tool that you can leverage to help control your body weight over the course of your entire life. While calorie counting has been around for over a century, there are a lot of new ideas and concepts that have made it a much more effective tool in modern society.

In this guide, you will learn about the theory behind calorie counting, exactly how it works, how to find your personalized calorie goal, and how to best track your calories. You will also learn about the main nutrients that contribute to your calorie intake and what your personalized nutrient recommendations should be. We hope that after reviewing this guide, you are armed with all the information you need to successfully create your own calorie-counting framework and apply it in your life!

## About NASM

The National Academy of Sports Medicine is the leader in educating and credentialing fitness, wellness, and performance professionals across the globe. We provide valid, up-to-date content on topics that improve the health and well-being of those they serve. We pride ourselves on creating practical content you can apply right away. Learn more about us at [www.nasm.org](http://www.nasm.org), your favorite social media platform, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

## Getting the Most from This Guide

This Guide to Calorie Counting will walk you through information explaining a little bit of the “why” behind the “how”. We’ll make sense of the information out there, so you won’t have to. Then we’ll give you some key takeaways and actionable steps to apply whenever you like.

Come back and use the information as a reference any time. Be sure to use the key takeaways and application strategies in whatever way makes sense for you. Don’t feel obligated to put *everything* into action right away. When you’re ready for a deeper dive into the topic, check out our recommended resources.





# Introduction

You have probably heard of the concept of calorie counting, most likely in the context of dieting and weight loss. While it has become a very popular topic in the nutrition industry over the last several decades, the concept of calorie counting is not new. In fact, it is believed that calorie counting as a weight loss tool has been used for more than a century (Jou, 2019). The practice of calorie counting for weight loss was quite common in the 1920s and 1930s as a result of popular dietary books and news articles that highlighted the success of calorie counting for weight loss.

But what exactly is calorie counting? When you break down the concept to its most fundamental idea, calorie counting is simply estimating the amount of total energy you are consuming from the foods you eat. By understanding how many calories you consume and adjusting that total calorie consumption up or down, you can lose, gain, or maintain your body weight. This idea is based on one of the most fundamental aspects of weight management: Energy balance.

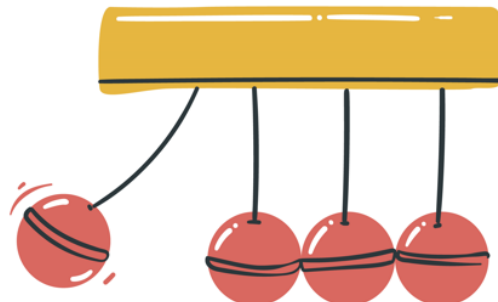
## Energy Balance

Before developing a successful calorie counting framework, we need to understand energy balance. Energy balance is perhaps the most fundamental concept when it comes to weight management and is also pivotal in overall human health and even human performance. You might think that the concept of energy balance starts with food or even with exercise, but it is actually something even more fundamental than that: It starts with physics. Energy balance is a concept that defines how we either gain or lose body weight and is based on the law of conservation of energy.

Right now you might be asking yourself, “What does this have to do with counting calories?” It has everything to do with counting calories. Your body is also subject to the law of conservation of energy. Your body cannot create or destroy energy, it simply converts it. This fundamental truth is that we will starve to death if we don’t eat food. We cannot create our own energy. We simply convert energy from one type to another.

### Law of Conservation of Energy

The law of conservation of energy states that energy cannot be created or destroyed, it can only be converted.



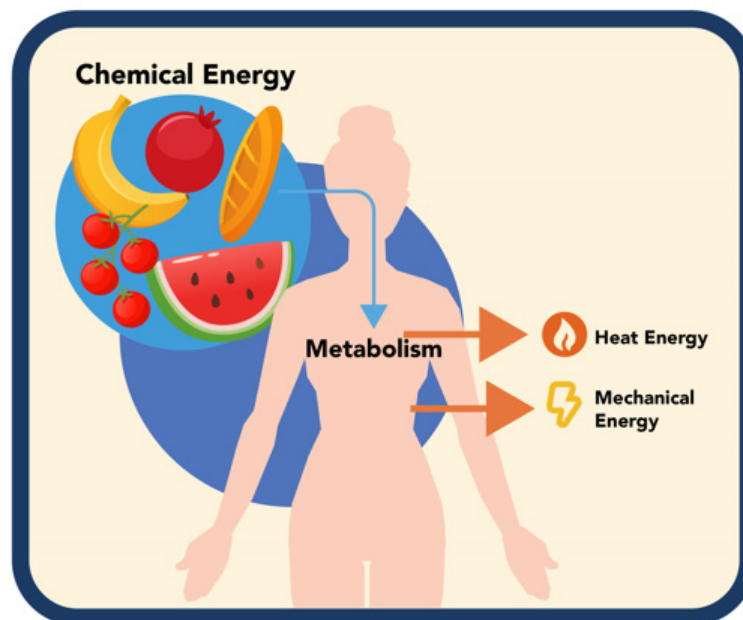
## DIGGING DEEPER

### Converting Energy

Our bodies are energy conversion machines. We convert chemical energy into mechanical energy, heat energy, or back into chemical energy. Here is how our bodies do this:

- ➔ Chemical energy is converted into mechanical energy when we move our bodies.
- ➔ Chemical energy is converted into heat energy as a byproduct of our metabolism.
- ➔ Chemical energy is converted into stored chemical energy in our body fat and glycogen stores, and also in our body tissue, including our muscle, bones, and other organs.

When we consume food, we are consuming a form of chemical energy; specifically, we are consuming the stored energy in the chemical bonds that are in our food. We measure the amount of total energy in a food in a unit known as a kilocalorie, or “calorie”. Our body and metabolism then convert that chemical energy either into mechanical energy when we move around or heat energy when we produce heat to keep our bodies warm. Finally, we store any extra chemical energy we do not use in the form of triglycerides (fat) or glycogen (carbohydrates).



This means that if we cannot create nor destroy energy, our bodies act as a bank account for differences between our daily deposits and withdrawals of energy (Hall et al., 2012; Hill et al., 2013). Some days we might eat a little bit less energy than we expend, other days we might eat a little bit more energy than we expend, and some days we probably eat the exact same energy that we expend. This means that our body can be in one of three different states of energy balance. Understanding this fundamental concept means you now have the most powerful tool to manipulate and change your body weight.

However, you might have noticed something important. There are two major aspects to energy balance: The energy going into the body and the energy leaving the body. These two things are the major levers you will be pulling on for calorie counting, so let's explore them further.

## States of Energy Balance



### Positive Energy Balance

Energy going into the body > Energy leaving the body



### Negative Energy Balance

Energy going into the body < Energy leaving the body



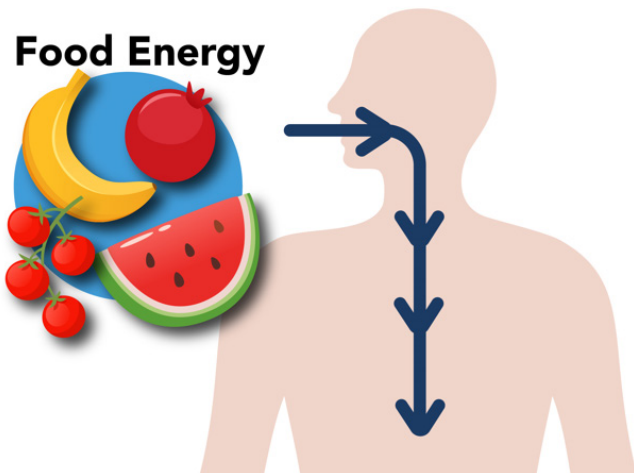
### Equal Energy Balance

Energy going into the body = Energy leaving the body

## Energy Intake

The energy going into your body, which we will call "energy intake", is relatively straightforward to understand. All of our energy intake comes from the calories found in the food and drinks you consume. While there are nuances about how the body processes different types of calories (that is an energy-out discussion), energy intake is the number of calories you consume over a given timeframe.

### Food Energy

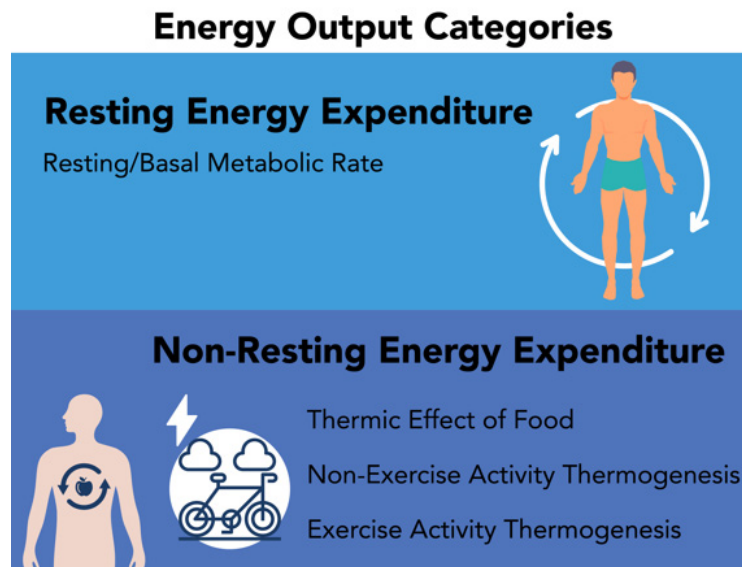


## Energy Output

While energy intake is straightforward, energy output gets fairly complicated. Your body is a complicated biological system and the amount of energy it uses (calories it burns) varies a lot based on many different factors. Fortunately, although it is complicated, we can break it down into small parts and it becomes relatively easy to understand.

To start, we can break your energy output into two basic categories: **Resting energy expenditure** and **non-resting energy expenditure**. Resting energy expenditure is the energy that your body uses at complete rest. This includes the energy you use to breathe, pump blood, move nutrients and oxygen into and out of cells, and all the other "life support" style processes your body requires to survive. The non-resting energy expenditure includes the energy for everything else like processing and digesting the food you eat, movement, and any other active processes you engage in.

We often categorize the non-resting energy expenditure into the main processes of energy expenditure. Figure: Energy Output Categories shows how they are most often categorized.



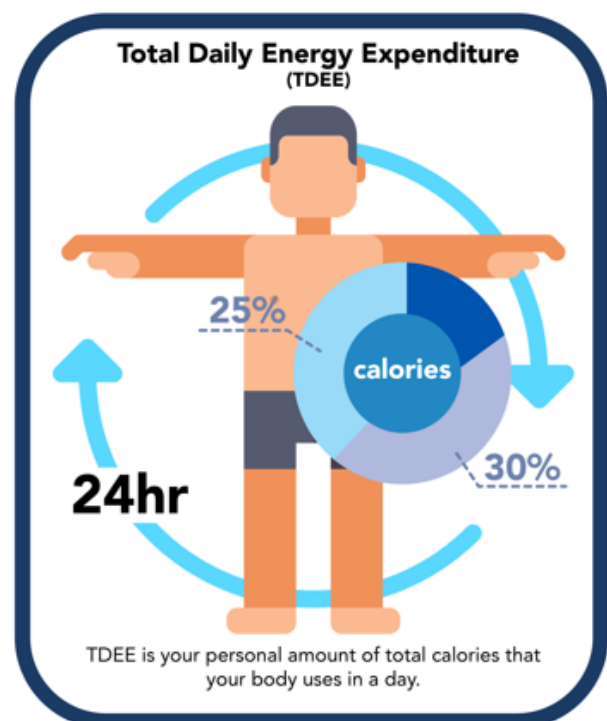
## Determining How Many Calories You Need

At this point you now have the foundational knowledge of the following:

1. Why calories are important
2. What calories are
3. What energy balance is
4. What contributes to energy balance

With these pieces in place, you are ready to start building your own calorie-counting framework and use it in your own life to great success.

Creating your own calorie counting framework has two parts: 1) Determine how many total calories your body is expending in a given day, and 2) Decide what your goal is and adjust your intake target to match that goal.



# Determine Your Personal Total Energy Expenditure

You just learned about the components that make up your total energy output. Now it is time to put that information to use. When you add up the different components that make up your energy output, you get a number known as your **Total Daily Energy Expenditure**, often called your TDEE. Your TDEE is your personal amount of total calories that your body spends in a day.

So, let's figure out exactly how you can determine your own TDEE.

It turns out that calculating your own TDEE is intuitive and relatively straightforward. You can either use online calculators that have been developed to do the math for you. Here at NASM, we have one that we have made for you:

You can put in your basic personal information and the calculator will give you a close estimate of what your TDEE is.

The other way to determine your TDEE is to use one of the estimating equations published in the scientific literature. While there are several equations, one of the most popular equations is the Mifflin–St. Jeor equation. It comprises two main steps: 1) Determine your resting/basal metabolic rate (BMR), and 2) Adjust for your physical activity.

Body Weight Planner1/4

Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR)

Enter the following information to calculate the client's Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR).

Client's Name

Name

UnitsU.S. ▾

Weight0 lb

Height


Feet '0 ft

Inches "0 in

GenderMale ▾

Age0 yr

Start


Based on the NIH Body Weight Planner

## DIGGING DEEPER

### What makes up your BMR?

Your basal metabolic rate (sometimes called your resting metabolic rate) is essentially the calories your body requires to function at complete rest. Being at rest is quite energy intensive. You have to keep your blood pumping, your kidneys filtering, your nervous system firing, and body warm. All of these processes require a fairly significant amount of calories.

[NASM Body Weight Planner Calculator](#)



**Step 1: Determine Your Resting/Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR)**

In order to estimate your BMR, you need is your age (in years), weight (in kilograms), and height (in centimeters). You also need to select a biological sex. Once you have that information, plug those three numbers into one of the following equations (Mifflin et al., 1990):

- ➔ **Men:**  $\text{BMR} = (10 * \text{weight in kg}) + (6.25 * \text{height in cm}) - (5 * \text{age in years}) + 5$
- ➔ **Women:**  $\text{BMR} = (10 * \text{weight in kg}) + (6.25 * \text{height in cm}) - (5 * \text{age in years}) - 161$

**DIGGING DEEPER****Large Deficits and Sustainability**

Most people in the United States use pounds and inches instead of kilograms and centimeters. You can convert them back and forth with simple math:

To convert pounds to kilograms, divide by 2.205. For example, a 200-lb person would be 90.7 kg ( $200 / 2.205 = 90.7$ ).

To convert inches to centimeters, multiply by 2.54. For example, a person who is 5'7" (67 inches) would be 170.2 centimeters ( $67 * 2.54 = 170.2$ ).

**Step 2: Adjust for Your Personal Activity Level (PAL)**

There are two components to your calorie expenditure: Resting and non-resting expenditures. Now that you know your resting calorie expenditure, you need to figure out your non-resting energy expenditure. This can get complicated, but there is an easier way to figure it out: Adjust the resting calorie expenditure based on your average daily activity level (Westterterp, 2013). Your personal activity level (PAL) accounts for all activity across the day, not just your structured sessions. While it is not 100% perfect, it is fairly close. Here are the PAL adjustments based on your lifestyle:

- ➔ Sedentary or light activity lifestyle: 1.4 to 1.69
- ➔ Active or moderately active lifestyle: 1.7 to 1.99
- ➔ Vigorous or vigorously active lifestyle: 2.00 to 2.40

Most individuals fall into the sedentary or moderately activity lifestyle and get a PAL of 1.4 to 1.99. Individuals who work highly active jobs (heavy construction) or are professional athletes might fall into the vigorously active category.

### Step 3: Complete the Calculation

Let's walk through the calculation so you can do this yourself as you read along. Let's take a 180-pound (81.6 kg), 6'0" (183 cm), 35-year-old male who lives a moderately active lifestyle.

1.  $BMR = (10 * 81.6) + (6.25 * 183) - (5 * 35) + 5 = 1,780$  kcals
2.  $PAL = 1.7$
3.  $TDEE = 1,780 \text{ kcals} * 1.7 = 3,026$  kcals per day

This means that in order to perfectly match energy expenditure with food intake, this person needs to consume ~3,000 calories per day.

## Setting Your Personal Calorie Goal

Now that you know your own personal TDEE, you will need to set your own personal calorie goal based on your specific goals. If your goal is to maintain your body weight, set your calorie goal to match your TDEE. If your goal is to lose weight, set your calorie goal below your TDEE. If your goal is to gain muscle, set your calorie goal above your TDEE (**Table: Body Weight vs. Calorie Goal**).

Body Weight vs. Calorie Goal	
Body Weight Goal	Calorie Goal
Maintenance	Equal to TDEE
Weight Loss	Less than TDEE
Gain Muscle	Greater than TDEE

The next question you are probably asking is how much below TDEE should you be for weight loss and how much above your TDEE should you be for muscle gain. It turns out the answers are quite different depending on which goal you choose.

## Setting Personal Calorie Goals for Weight Loss

If your goal is to lose weight, set your calorie target somewhere around 300 to 1,000 calories per day below your TDEE. At first glance, this might seem like a very large range, and it is. The large range is due to the fact that everyone has different bodies and weight loss goals. If you are a smaller individual (less than 200 pounds) and have modest weight-loss goals (10 to 20 pounds), a calorie goal of 300 to 500 below your TDEE is appropriate. If you are a larger individual and have larger weight loss goals, a calorie goal of 500 to 1,000 below your TDEE is appropriate. Let's work through a few examples to highlight this. Let's take the example we calculated above for the 6'0" (183 cm), 180-pound (81.6 kg), 35-year-old

male who lives a moderately active lifestyle and assume their weight loss goal is 10 pounds. Because their TDEE was ~3,000 kcals, you could set their calorie target at ~2,500 calories. This would still be a fairly decent amount of food for this person to eat and not feel overly hungry. However, that 500 calorie a day deficit would help them reach their weight loss goal in about 10 to 15 weeks (3 to 4 months).

Now, imagine there is a 5'8" (173 cm), 250-pound (113.4 kg), 43-year-old female who also lives a moderately active lifestyle and has a 60-pound weight loss goal. When we calculate their TDEE, we get 3,126 kcals. This person might benefit from a slightly larger deficit of around 700 kcals per day, which would set their calorie target at ~2,400 kcals. This deficit would help them reach their weight loss goals in around 10 months.

There is a balance to strike with setting weight loss calorie goals. If there is too small of a deficit, it takes longer to get to a specific result. If there is too large of a deficit, adhering to caloric restriction becomes a problem. Setting a range between 300 and 1,000 kcals per day, depending on your TDEE and body size, is a good range to stay within for most people (Chow & Hall, 2008; Hall, 2008).

## DIGGING DEEPER

### Large Deficits and Sustainability

While larger calorie deficits can yield faster results, larger deficits might not be advised for everyone. Larger calorie deficits often result in higher levels of hunger and require much more structure to sustain. Generally speaking, adherence is often lower with larger deficits. Additionally, while larger deficits start off as quite large, as you lose weight those deficits become smaller and weight loss slows. This can psychologically make adherence harder as well since the results are slower but the apparent deficit appears to be the same to the person dieting.

## Setting Personal Calorie Goals for Muscle Gain

Setting your personal calorie goal for muscle gain is a little more straightforward than for weight loss. This is because there appears to be an upper ceiling for how fast your body can build muscle without pharmaceutical intervention. This means that the goal is to consume enough calories above your TDEE to allow for muscle growth while minimizing increases in body fat.

There is evidence to suggest that calorie surpluses around 300 kcals per day appear to be optimal for promoting muscle growth while helping to minimize increases in body fat. However, these surpluses need to be combined with resistance training. Eating in a slight surplus is unlikely to add meaningful amounts of muscle mass if there is no concurrent resistance training (Slater et al., 2019). Recently a study was conducted to see if surpluses slightly higher than 300 kcals would result in more muscle growth. That study found that larger surpluses (~700 kcal) do not necessarily increase muscle mass more than the moderate surpluses, but they do lead to increases in body fat (Helms et al., 2023). As such, most people who are looking to gain muscle should aim for ~300 kcals per day above their TDEE.

# Counting and Tracking Your Calories

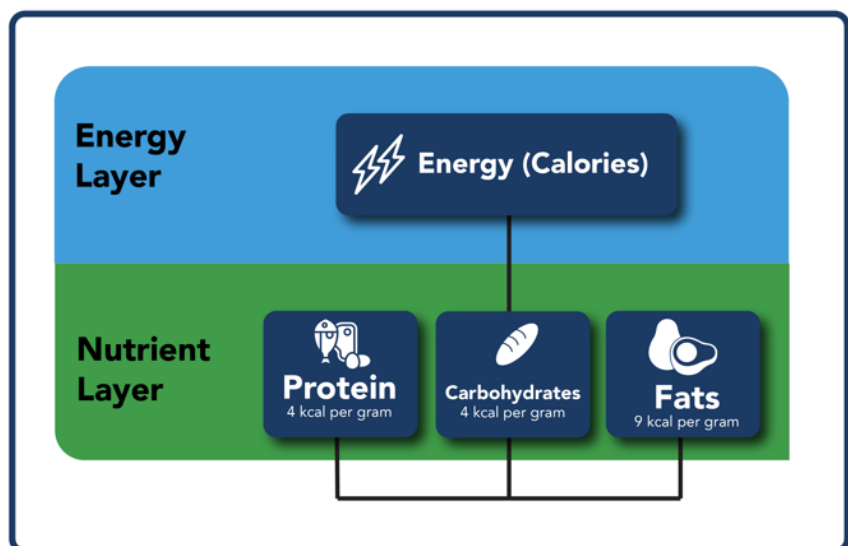
You are now armed with the knowledge of why calorie counting is effective, how to determine your calorie needs, and even how to set your own personalized calorie goal. Now it is time to take that information and develop a plan for how you are going to meet your personalized calorie goal on a daily basis.

When you think about counting and tracking your calories, think about it in two layers. The first layer is the “energy” layer. This is all the calories you consume on a daily basis. The second layer is the “nutrient” layer. This layer represents the nutrients you consume that contribute to your total energy intake. The nutrients that you consume that contribute to your total energy intake are known as the macronutrients, or “macros”. In order to track your calories and your nutrients effectively, you should develop skills in tracking both. These two layers represent the two primary ways that you can track your calories.

The first and most simple way is to add the calories of all the food you eat in a day based on the calories per serving and the amount of servings you consume. This is usually done by tracking the foods you eat as you consume them. For example, this might mean that you record your breakfast, lunch, dinner, and any snacks when you eat them. Then you add up all the calories you consumed at the end of the day.

The second way to track your total calories is to track your nutrients—specifically your macronutrients—and then add all the calories from those nutrients together to determine your total daily calorie intake. This method does require more work, but it is often a more accurate approach and can help people ensure they are consuming adequate amounts of nutrients along with their calories. This approach is often referred to as “tracking your macros” instead of tracking calories. However, it essentially is just a way of taking your personal calorie goal and dividing those calories into nutrients.

In order to track your calories and your nutrients effectively, you should develop skills in tracking both.





# Tracking Total Calories Approach

Tracking calories can be a relatively straightforward process and involves relatively little amount of effort. In order to track calories, you need to know the calories in each serving of food you consume and how many servings of that food you consume. You can find this information either on nutrition labels, online food databases, or calorie-tracking software. Then you can record the foods you are consuming, the amount you are consuming, and the calories in the foods you are consuming, and add them up each day.

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>				
2 servings per container				
<b>Serving size</b>		<b>1 cup (230g)</b>		
<b>Calories</b>		<b>Per serving</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>Per container</b>
				<b>490</b>
		<b>% DV*</b>		<b>% DV*</b>
<b>Total Fat</b>	12g	<b>14%</b>	24g	<b>29%</b>
Saturated Fat	2g	<b>10%</b>	4g	<b>20%</b>
Trans Fat	0g		0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b>	8mg	<b>3%</b>	16mg	<b>5%</b>
<b>Sodium</b>	210mg	<b>9%</b>	420mg	<b>18%</b>
<b>Total Carb.</b>	34g	<b>12%</b>	68g	<b>24%</b>
Dietary Fiber	7g	<b>25%</b>	14g	<b>50%</b>
Total Sugars	5g		10g	
Incl. Added Sugars	4g	<b>8%</b>	8g	<b>16%</b>
<b>Protein</b>	11g		22g	
Vitamin D	4mcg	20%	8mcg	40%
Calcium	210mg	16%	420mg	32%
Iron	3mg	15%	6mg	30%
Potassium	380mg	8%	760mg	16%

\*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Here is an example of what tracking your calories might look like for a given food or meal. This is a nutrition label from a food packaging. Imagine that this was a pre-packaged meal that contained a mix of food and you decided to eat this for a snack. This specific package of food contains two servings and each serving size is 1 cup (230 g). If you decided to eat the entire package of

food, you would record this meal as 490 calories. However, if you ate only a single serving (half the package) you would record 245 calories. Repeat this process with the next food you consume until you have recorded your entire day. The goal here is to ensure that your total daily calorie intake matches your personal calorie goal.

# Tracking Macros Approach

Tracking your calories by tracking your macronutrients has the same end result as tracking only calories, but it can be a more effective tool for some people because you can ensure you are getting the right mix of nutrients for your body. If you only track and care about calories, you could, in theory, eat only fat or only carbohydrates for the entirety of your daily calories. While that theoretically works due to the concept of energy balance, your body needs more than just calories, it actually needs specific nutrients to function properly.

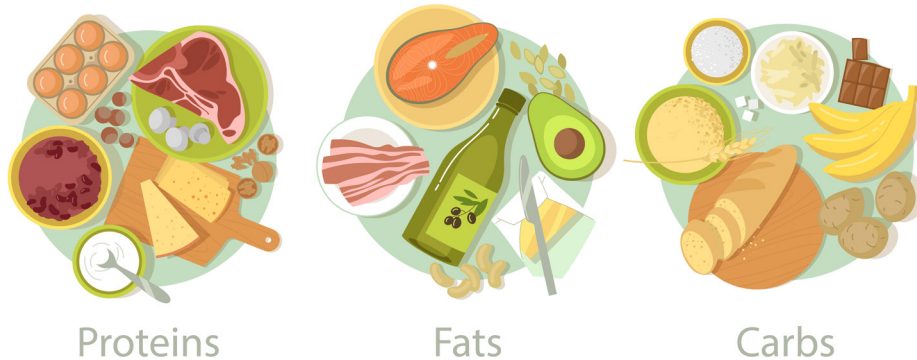
If you decide to go the route of tracking your calories through macronutrients, the next step is to determine how much of each nutrient you might need. This process is more straightforward than you might think and you can use a few simple concepts to help you determine exactly how much of each nutrient you should consume. The easiest way to do this is to determine how much protein you need based on your body size and exercise level, and how many carbohydrates you need based on your activity. After you have those two nutrients, you can fill in the remaining calories with fats. Here are some guidelines for how to set your protein and carbohydrate goals (**Table: Protein and Carbohydrates Intake Guidelines for Various Activity Levels**).

## Protein and Carbohydrates Intake Guidelines for Various Activity Levels

Macronutrient	Activity Level		
	Sedentary	Moderately Active	Highly Active
<b>Protein</b>	0.6 to 0.8 g/lb	0.7 to 0.9 g/lb	0.8 to 1.0 g/lb
<b>Carbohydrates</b>	1.0 to 1.5 g/lb	1.0 to 2.0 g/lb	1.5 to 3.0 g/lb

Once you set these targets, you can “back fill” the rest of the calories from fats. We can use our earlier example from our calorie goal-setting section. Let’s use the 6’0” (183 cm), 180-pound (81.6 kg), 35-year-old male who lives a moderately active lifestyle with the weight loss goal of 10 pounds. Their total calorie intake goal was ~2,500 calories, so we can now calculate their macronutrients.

- ➔ **Protein:** 0.8 g per pound of body weight =  $180 \times 0.8 = 162$  grams
  - 162 grams  $\times$  4 kcals per gram = 648 kcals from protein
- ➔ **Carbohydrates:** 1.5 grams per pound of body weight =  $180 \times 1.5 = 270$  grams of carbohydrates
  - 270 grams  $\times$  4 kcals per gram = 1,080 kcals from carbohydrates
- ➔ **Fats:** 2,500 kcals - 648 protein kcals - 1080 carbohydrate kcals = 772 calories from fat
  - 772 kcals / 9 kcals per gram = 86 grams of fat



This person’s calorie counting framework would look like this:

- ➔ **Total Calorie Goal:** 2,500 kcals per day
- ➔ **Total Protein Goal:** 162 grams of protein per day
- ➔ **Total Carbohydrate Goal:** 270 grams of carbohydrates per day
- ➔ **Total Fat Goal:** 86 grams of fat per day

## Tracking Your Macros

The process of counting your calories by tracking your macros is the exact same as counting calories, with the only difference being that you need to make food selections based not only on whether it fits your calories, but also whether it fits the nutrients you need to consume. If we revisit the same food we consumed earlier and look not only at the calorie contents but the nutrients in it, we can understand this quite easily.

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>			
2 servings per container			
<b>Serving size</b>		<b>1 cup (230g)</b>	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>Per serving</b>	<b>Per container</b>	
	<b>245</b>	<b>490</b>	
	<b>% DV*</b>	<b>% DV*</b>	
<b>Total Fat</b>	12g <b>14%</b>	24g <b>29%</b>	
Saturated Fat	2g <b>10%</b>	4g <b>20%</b>	
Trans Fat	0g	0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b>	8mg <b>3%</b>	16mg <b>5%</b>	
<b>Sodium</b>	210mg <b>9%</b>	420mg <b>18%</b>	
<b>Total Carb.</b>	34g <b>12%</b>	68g <b>24%</b>	
Dietary Fiber	7g <b>25%</b>	14g <b>50%</b>	
Total Sugars	5g	10g	
Incl. Added Sugars	4g <b>8%</b>	8g <b>16%</b>	
<b>Protein</b>	11g	22g	
Vitamin D	4mcg 20%	8mcg 40%	
Calcium	210mg 16%	420mg 32%	
Iron	3mg 15%	6mg 30%	
Potassium	380mg 8%	760mg 16%	

\*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

With this specific food, we are not only consuming 490 calories if we consume the whole package, but we are also consuming 22 grams of protein, 68 grams of carbohydrates, and 24 grams of fat. This means that after consuming this food, we need to record these and make sure we know how much is left for the rest of our daily intake. Here is what that looks like:

### Calories:

$$2,500 - 490 = 2,010 \text{ kcals left}$$

### Protein:

$$162 - 22 = 140 \text{ grams of protein left}$$

### Carbohydrates:

$$270 - 68 = 202 \text{ grams of carbohydrates left}$$

### Fats:

$$86 - 24 = 62 \text{ grams of fats left}$$

For the rest of your snacks and meals that day, you might have to adjust the types of foods you consume or the total servings sizes to make sure you are meeting your calorie and nutrient goals.

## Tips and Tricks for Tracking

At first glance, creating your calorie counting framework might sound both easy and complicated at the same time. That is because it is both! It is easy because it is a straightforward concept. It is complicated because it requires being thoughtful and some degree of planning. There are some basic ideas and concepts that can help you ensure that your efforts in calorie counting and/or macro tracking are successful. We are going to cover the most effective tips and tricks to help you be successful right out of the gate.



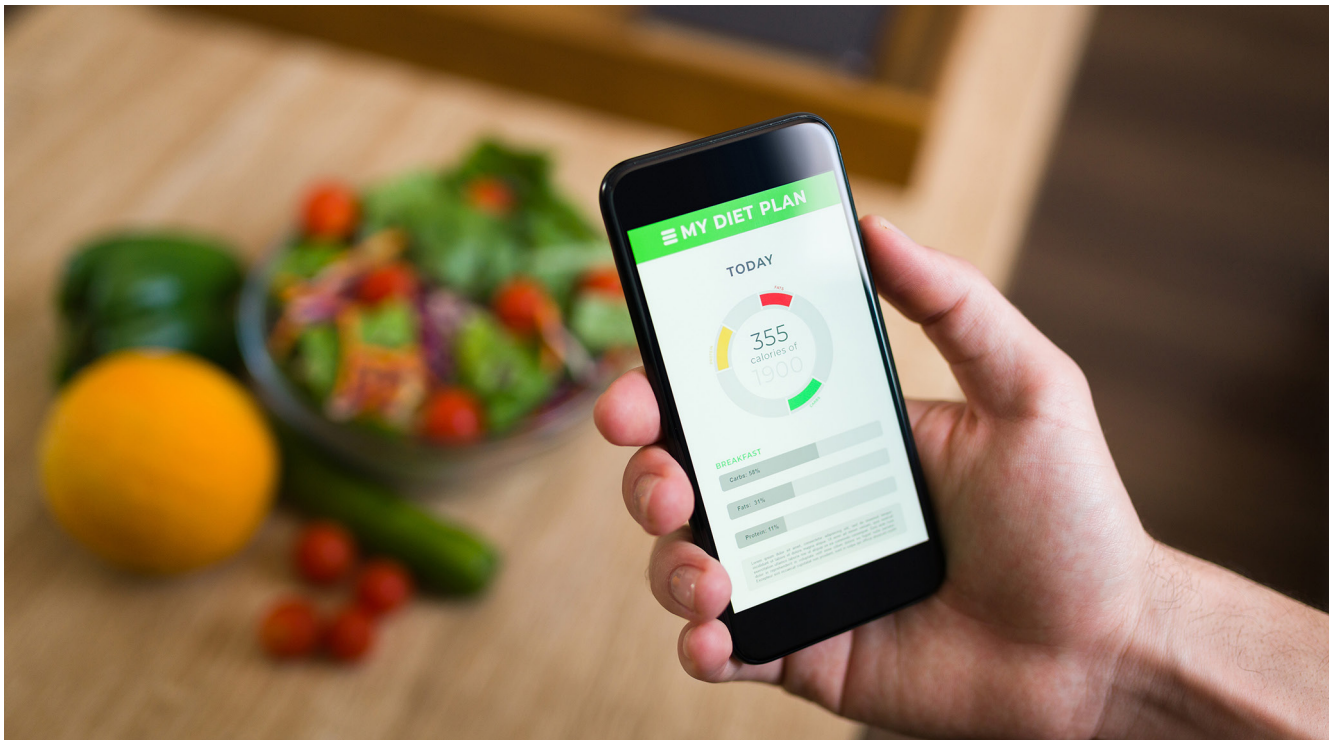
## Pre-Plan Your Day

Perhaps the biggest challenge you might face when counting your calories is exactly how to reach your daily calorie goal consistently. At first, if you are eating food and tracking it as you go, you might feel like it is difficult to find foods that meet your goals later in the day. The single best way you can avoid this and make counting your calories easy is to plan your day ahead of time. Simply write down the foods you plan on consuming and the calories and/or macronutrients of those foods the day before. Then, adjust either portion sizes or food options until you have a day of eating planned ahead of time that fits your goals.

## Use an App

Food-logging apps have made calorie counting incredibly easy and often require less than 5 minutes of your entire day. Many food-logging apps are available on your phone and some come with barcode scanners, image recognition, and easily searchable databases. From the app, select the food you are eating as well as the serving size, and it will record the information for you. These apps often allow you to save frequently consumed foods and can even make recommendations for what foods you can consume based on the number of calories and/or macronutrients you have left for that day.

One of the most effective ways to use a food-logging app is to spend a small amount of time entering all the foods you regularly consume. If you are like most people, you likely consume the same 40 to 50 foods 90% of the time. This means that if you spend about an hour or so putting all your favorite foods into your food logging app, you will likely have 90% of your work done for the foreseeable future.





# Conclusion

Calorie counting has been an effective tool for managing body weight for over a century, and for good reasons. First, calorie counting is based on the most fundamental principle of weight management: Energy balance. Second, when utilized correctly, it is one of the single most powerful nutritional tools you can use because it gives you objective feedback about your nutrition habits. Finally, it is “diet-agnostic”, meaning that you can use this tool regardless of what dietary pattern you follow. You can count calories following a Mediterranean diet, a paleo diet, a keto diet, or even a vegan diet. You can count calories if you are intermittent fasting or following any other pattern of eating. Calorie counting is a tool and a skillset that you can apply to any dietary intervention.

The application of calorie counting has been made much easier and simpler with modern technology. Between calorie calculators and food-logging apps, you can easily count your calories with less than 10 minutes of effort per day. Regardless of your exact goals, counting your calories and tracking your food also helps you understand your own nutrition behaviors and can teach you about things like portion sizes, energy density, and help you build an intuition around the calorie content of different foods you eat.



# What You Can Do Now

- ➔ Determine your own personal calorie expenditure using a calculator like the [NASM Body Weight Planner Calculator](#) or using an estimating equation like the Mifflin–St. Jeor equation.
- ➔ Decide what your goal is (weight loss, maintenance, or gain), and set your calorie intake based on your goal.
- ➔ After you have your calorie intake target set, set your nutrient intake targets.
- ➔ Protein should be between 0.6 and 1.0 grams per pound of body weight based on activity level.
- ➔ Carbohydrates should be between 1.0 and 3.0 grams per pound of body weight based on activity level.
- ➔ Fats should be the remaining calories after protein and carbohydrates are accounted for.
- ➔ Decide whether you would like to log using a pen-and-paper journal or a food logging application.
- ➔ Write down or log the 40 to 50 foods that you most commonly consume.
- ➔ Preplan your next day of eating into your journal or app, and then adjust your serving sizes or food choices until you reach your calorie and nutrient targets.
- ➔ Follow that plan and eat those foods.
- ➔ Rinse and repeat until you reach your goal!

## Online Resources

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Want to learn more about nutrition? Here are a few places to find reliable information and insight about nutrition and healthy eating behaviors.

- ➔ [NASM's Certified Nutrition Coach Certification \(NASM-CNC\)](#)
- ➔ [NASM Blog](#)
- ➔ [NASM's YouTube Channel](#)

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