

Should You Track Macronutrients?

Calories and macronutrients are two of the most basic - and important - nutrition principles to understand. In the [Become a Nutrition Coach Program](#), I cover both topics in depth in the very beginning.

One of the most common questions I get from students is, “What are your suggestions for how to match macronutrient percentages to different individuals? Should we all use the same percentage breakdown or should it vary by person?” Here’s what I tell them.

Typically I recommend $\frac{1}{3}$ of calories to come from each macronutrient (protein, carbohydrates and fat) with a little more carbs. This is not exact (we do need a little bit more carbohydrates), but I say this for people to have an understanding that all three macronutrients are important. So, think of it this way, “ $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{3}$ ”.

People often don’t realize how much fat they need, that fat and protein needs are pretty close, and that we’re getting carbohydrates from so many places. You can have 40% of your calories from carbohydrates and never eat a slice of bread, or have rice, pasta or cookies. You can have a perfectly balanced meal plan that includes 40% of calories from carbohydrates all coming from foods like vegetables, fruits, and beans. It’s really not that difficult to get in that amount of carbs without having the foods that we typically say are the “unhealthy” types of carbs.

That’s why I usually give the ratio of $\frac{1}{3}$ of each macro, and then when I do a meal plan for someone I’ll usually break down a sample day. Let’s say it’s an egg scramble for breakfast, and then a salad with salmon and chickpeas, then a yogurt with some nuts on it, etc. Then I’ll ask the person, “Do you think this is low, medium or high carb?” and usually people will say low carb because they don’t see bread, pasta, cookies or

foods like that. Then I'll tell them "Actually, this is 42% carbs," (or whatever it is), and people gain an understanding that they get carbs from other places.

My philosophy of " $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{3}$ " is a general way to look at it. It isn't exact but makes the point that each of the nutrients are super important.

Some people may be a little different, of course. For example, athletes, especially endurance athletes, are going to need more carbs. Or two people who seem pretty similar might just have completely different ways of metabolizing food. Some people can't handle too much food in the morning, while others need to eat the second they wake up. People are different and we are all unique, so you do need to adjust it slightly for the individual, but overall most people are going to fall into the $\frac{1}{3}$ proportion.

Another point on this: The ketogenic diet is very popular right now. I'm not generally a fan of that, but that's another example where someone might feel awful on the diet and other people feel really good.

One more point: In general I like people to get away from calculating every single macro because I think it's the same thing as counting calories. It can get in your head more than food should. In Lesson 10 of the [Become a Nutrition Coach Program](#), I talk about meal planning, and when I give a meal plan I say that if they eat according to this basic template, the " $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{3}$ " will naturally fall into place without counting macros. Similarly, if you eat whole real foods and listen to your body you are generally going to fall into the caloric range you need without counting every calorie.

Finally, there is some research showing counting macros doesn't make a difference for weight loss:

- [This study](#) found reduced calorie diets worked regardless of macronutrient breakdown.
- [Another study](#) found there is probably little or no difference in weight loss and changes in cardiovascular risk factors when overweight and obese adults eat either low carb diets or balanced diets when calories are kept the same.
- [This meta-analysis](#) of long-term randomized controlled trials found high-protein diets had neither beneficial nor detrimental effects on markers of obesity, cardiovascular disease or glycemic control.