

**MACROFACTOR**

# **THE FAT LOSS HANDBOOK**

Science-Backed Strategies to  
Lose Fat and Preserve Muscle

# FAT LOSS CHEAT SHEET

## Diet and Strategy Tips

- **The goal of fat loss is to lose fat while keeping muscle.** You can call it cutting or weight loss, but what matters is reducing body fat while preserving lean mass and making steady, long-term progress.
- **Create a consistent deficit.** You lose fat when you burn more Calories than you eat. The goal is to maintain a consistent energy deficit until your target is reached.
- **Be only as aggressive as you need for motivation.** Most people should aim to lose 0.25–1% of body weight per week. Faster losses raise the risk of muscle loss and diet fatigue. Slower losses preserve more muscle and make the diet easier to maintain.

### Recommended rates of cutting

|                                    | Very conservative | Conservative | Moderate  | Slightly aggressive | Aggressive |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|-----------|---------------------|------------|
| Percentage of body weight per week | 0.10%             | 0.25%        | 0.5–0.75% | 1.0%                | 1.5%*      |
| Relative energy deficit            | <5%               | 5–10%        | 10–20%    | 20–30%              | >30%       |

\* We'd recommend to keep your rate of weight loss below 2 pounds or 1 kilogram per week. Regardless of bodyweight, that's a quite aggressive rate of weight loss.

- **MacroFactor makes it simple.** If you're planning on using MacroFactor to guide your fat loss, the process of setting up and adjusting your diet couldn't be simpler. When creating your diet in the app, set a goal to lose weight, choose the macronutrient distribution that suits your preference, and select a "moderate" or "high" protein goal.
- **Protein intake is important.** Higher protein intakes (around 1.6–2.2 g/kg of body weight or 2.6–3.5 g/kg of fat-free mass) support muscle growth and help retain lean tissue during fat loss.
- **Lifting helps optimize muscle retention.** Protein intake is important, but resistance training provides the stimulus that protects against muscle loss during a deficit.
- **Try to make the most out of the food you eat.** Do your best to hit your Calories and macros by the end of the day. Being in a deficit, you need to lead with smart, healthy, whole-food choices, as there are fewer Calories available to repair and recover your body.
- **Supplements are not needed**, but here's a short list of a few to consider:
  - Creatine monohydrate: 5g per day, taken any time.
  - Protein powder: As needed to hit daily protein total.
  - Caffeine: 100–200mg before workouts, as needed.

## Training Tips

- For best results, do a combination of resistance and aerobic training.
- **For your resistance training**, aim to hit all major muscle groups around twice per week, with at least 6–10 hard weekly sets per muscle group.
  - If your performance in the gym is increasing, that's a good indication that you're gaining muscle.
  - If you're at least maintaining your performance, that's a good indication that you're not losing muscle.
- **For your aerobic training (cardio)**, aim for 2–4 sessions of 20–40 minutes per week, keeping your heart rate around 120–135 beats per minute. You don't need to measure your heart rate exactly.

## General Tips

- **Document your progress.** Take progress photos and body measurements (waist, arm, thigh, and chest circumferences) monthly. This tells you more about how your body is changing than a number on the scale.
- **Expect things to progress slowly.** Short-term scale changes can be misleading. Focus on consistent data over time, not daily numbers. If using MacroFactor, focus on the weight trend feature to help you get a better bigger picture.

**Time to crush it! Good luck!**

# Introduction

This guide is meant to give you a clear picture of how to set up your nutrition and training if your goal is to lose body fat. You can call that cutting, weight loss, or fat loss, but the name doesn't really matter. What matters is doing it in a way that reduces body fat while preserving as much muscle as possible. There's a big difference between fast but likely unsustainable weight loss versus following a structured plan that lets you make steady, long-term progress. The latter is what we're focused on here.

We'll walk you through how to estimate your daily energy needs, choose an appropriate rate of weight loss, set Calorie and macronutrient targets, and structure your training so you keep muscle while you're in a deficit.

Let's dig in.

## Step 1: Understanding the fundamentals of a cut

If you have a goal of losing weight, you need to be in an energy deficit, meaning you expend more energy than you consume. Your desired rate of weight loss determines the size of that deficit, since losing weight faster requires a larger energy deficit.

To understand this in a little more detail, it helps to know the CICO principle: Calories in – Calories out = Change in stored energy.

"Calories in" refers to the energy you consume through food and drink. "Calories out" is the total energy your body uses through daily activity, exercise, and the basic functions that keep you alive, such as breathing, digestion, and circulation. "Stored energy" reflects the fat, muscle, and glycogen in your body, which can increase or decrease depending on whether you're in a surplus or deficit.

If you consume more Calories than you burn, the excess is stored, mostly as body fat. If you consume fewer, your body taps into stored energy to make up the difference, leading to fat loss over time.

But how do you know how many Calories you need?

Caloric intake needs are based on total daily energy expenditure (TDEE), the number of Calories your body burns each day

## A practical example

Let's start with someone whose estimated TDEE is about 2900 Calories per day. At that intake, their weight *holds steady* over time.

Now imagine they reduce intake to 2400 Calories per day while keeping activity about the same. After a few weeks, they notice their weight is dropping by about 1lb per week. Since 1lb of fat tissue stores roughly 3500 Calories, losing that much per week means they're in a deficit of about 500 Calories per day ( $3500 \div 7$ ).

That also means their estimated daily energy expenditure (Calories out) hasn't changed; it's still roughly 2900 Calories, they're just consuming less than that now.

If they returned to 2900 Calories, their weight would likely stabilize again. If they pushed intake higher, say to 3200 Calories per day, that extra 300 Calories would become a surplus, and over time they'd likely gain about 0.6lb per week ( $300 \times 7 = 2,100$ , or a little more than half a pound of stored energy).

These numbers can change based on your activity level or shifts in body composition. For example, if you start walking or training more, your total expenditure can climb. On the other hand, if you become less active or lose a significant amount of body mass, it will likely drop. The take-home here is that TDEE isn't fixed — it moves with your behavior and body composition.

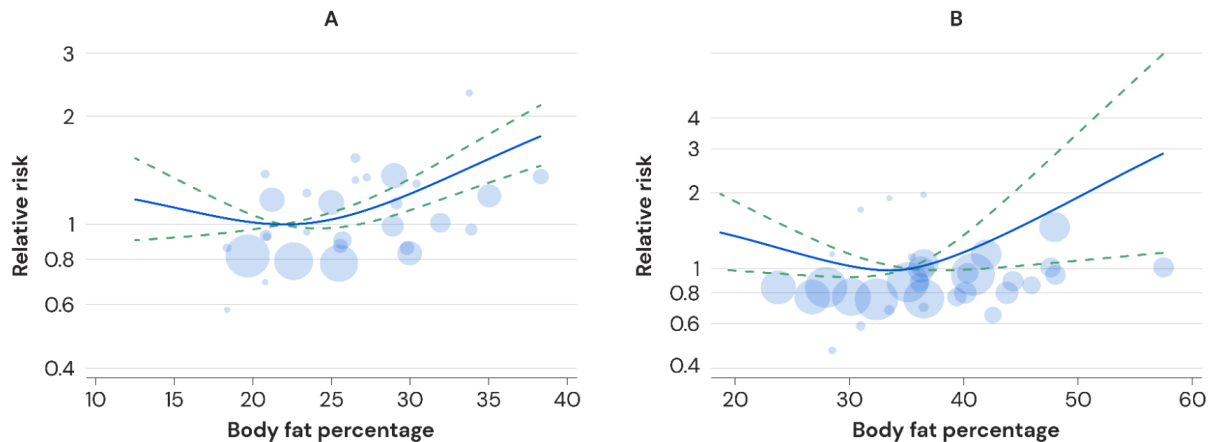
When it comes to fat loss, the goal is to maintain a consistent deficit until your target is reached. Fat loss occurs when you consistently create an energy deficit, burning more Calories than you take in. Your body then mobilizes stored fat, breaking it down so free fatty acids can enter the bloodstream and be used for energy. But mobilization doesn't guarantee fat loss because the fatty acids still have to be oxidized for fuel; if they aren't, they'll simply be re-stored as fat.

*That's why the overall balance of energy in versus energy out, is the deciding factor.* Whether you're walking, training, or even sleeping, your body is constantly deciding whether to use food you've eaten or dip into stored reserves.

## Who is a candidate for fat loss?

If your current body fat is higher than you'd like, or if health concerns such as [insulin resistance](#), [elevated blood pressure](#), or [poor blood lipid levels](#) are on your mind, losing fat can help lower those risks. From a population-level perspective, body fat levels above [roughly 25% for men and 35% for women](#) tend to increase the odds of long-term health issues. That doesn't mean you need to be below those numbers to be healthy, but it provides a useful frame of reference.

## Relationship between body fat percentage and all-cause mortality in men and women



Dose-response relationships between body fat percentage and all-cause mortality in men (A) and women (B). The solid lines represent the dose-response relationships, the dotted lines represent the 95% confidence intervals, and the circles represent relative risk point estimates for adiposity categories from each study with the size of the circle proportion to the inverse of the standard error.

From Jayedi et al (2022)

Aesthetics are also a common motivator. Many people simply prefer how they look and feel when they're leaner, and that's a perfectly valid reason to cut. You don't need to justify wanting to be leaner with complicated arguments about performance or physiology. If looking more defined excites you, that's reason enough.

Fat loss can also serve competitive goals. Athletes in weight-class sports may benefit from moving down a class if it can be done without hurting performance. Endurance athletes often improve efficiency by carrying less fat. Physique athletes, of course, need to cut to stage-ready levels of leanness. Even outside of competition, reducing fat can improve relative strength, power-to-weight ratio, and comfort in daily life.

Finally, fat loss may be appealing after a long bulk. Gaining muscle in a surplus is effective, but it usually comes with some added fat. A cutting phase helps reveal the muscle gained and provides a psychological reset before your next training block.

In short, you may be a candidate for fat loss if you:

- Have health reasons to lower body fat.
- Prefer how you look and feel when leaner.
- Compete in a sport where body fat or body weight impacts performance.
- Have recently finished a bulk and want to shed excess fat.

Ultimately, fat loss isn't the right move for everyone, but if being leaner excites you or supports your goals, it can be a productive phase to pursue.

## Step 2: Setting up your diet for a fat loss phase

If you're planning on using MacroFactor to guide your fat loss, the process of setting up and adjusting your diet couldn't be simpler.

When creating your diet in the app, set a goal for weight loss, select whichever macronutrient distribution suits your preference, and select a "moderate" or "high" protein goal. If you're a new user, and you already have a rough idea of your maintenance Calories, you can also enter a [manual estimate of your energy expenditure](#) (though, if you don't already know your maintenance intake, this certainly isn't necessary – the app will figure it out for you within your first 2–3 weeks of tracking). From there, MacroFactor will handle any necessary adjustments to help you lose fat successfully.

If you're using MacroFactor, that's all there is to it. With that, you *could* skip to the section titled "Building a complete nutritional strategy," though the next few sections will explain the process MacroFactor uses to set up and adjust your diet.

If you're not using MacroFactor, the following sections will discuss how you can set up and manage your diet manually.

### Setting up your diet manually

The process of managing your diet can be broken down into three simple, sequential steps, with a handful of sub-steps:

1. Determining your energy (i.e. Calorie) needs
  - a. Estimating your energy expenditure
  - b. Determining your Calorie targets based on your desired rate of weight loss
2. Determining your macronutrient requirements
  - a. Determining the protein requirements for your goal and lifestyle
  - b. Distributing carbs and fats
3. Making necessary adjustments as you see how your body responds to diet
  - a. Monitoring how your weight changes in response to your energy intake
  - b. Adjusting energy intake targets when your data suggests that your energy needs are higher or lower than previously predicted

The best and most practical way to start this process is to monitor your weight and your energy intake, and find the level of energy intake that allows you to maintain your current weight. If you've already been tracking your weight and nutrition data, and you already know the level of

energy intake required to maintain your current weight, you're in a good position to make adjustments. For instance, if you know you maintain your current weight when consuming 2500 Calories per day, then to lose body fat you need to select numbers below your maintenance level in order to lose weight.

If you *don't* already have a pretty good idea of TDEE or maintenance Calories that has been informed by prior weight and nutrition logging, the next best option is to estimate your energy expenditure using basic anthropometric, demographic, and lifestyle information. To do this, you first estimate how many Calories your body burns at rest (your [basal metabolic rate, or BMR](#)). From there, you can further estimate how many additional Calories you burn in excess of your BMR based on your activity levels. **FYI, when you're going through onboarding in MacroFactor, the app will walk you through this process of estimating your energy expenditure.**

For example, if a BMR equation estimates that you burn 1500 Calories per day at rest, you have a moderately active lifestyle, and you have 4 dedicated workouts per week, you'd multiply your BMR by 1.6, based on the activity correction factors above, to estimate your total energy expenditure at 2400 Calories.

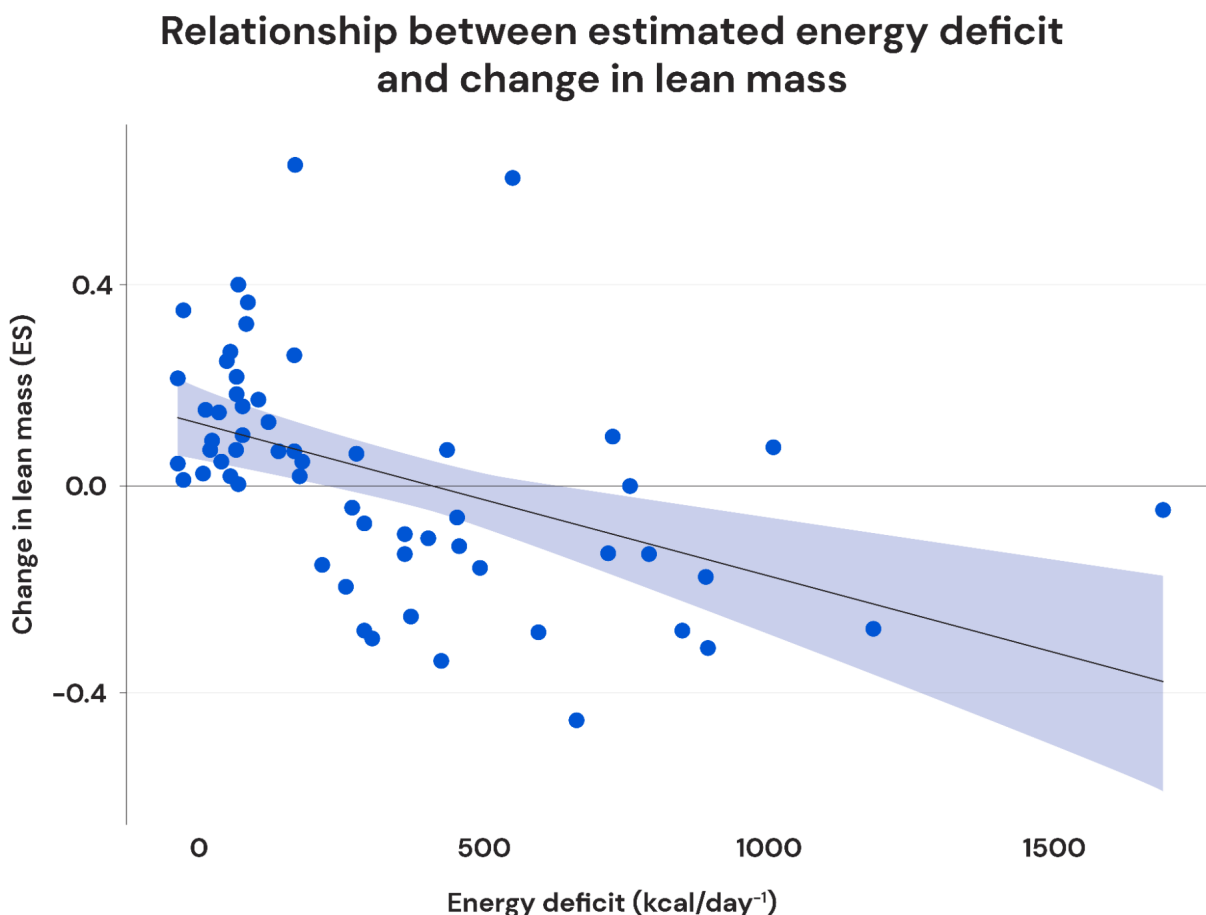
Of note, we *wouldn't* recommend using an estimate of your energy expenditure that comes from a [smartwatch or wearable device](#).

| MacroFactor Correction Factors |                        |                     |                        |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| General Activity               |                        | Exercise Activity   |                        |
| Category                       | MacroFactor correction | Training sessions   | MacroFactor correction |
| Low Activity                   | 1.2                    | 0 sessions / week   | +0                     |
| Moderate Activity              | 1.4                    | 1-3 sessions / week | +0.1                   |
| High Activity                  | 1.6                    | 4-6 sessions / week | +0.2                   |
|                                |                        | 7+ sessions / week  | +0.3                   |

## Selecting a target rate of weight change

Recommended rates of weight loss are going to differ depending on factors ranging from preservation of muscle to dietary adherence. For instance, losing muscle can make it harder to maintain your results since muscle loss appears to be a major contributor to [post-diet spikes in hunger](#), which can lead to “yo-yo dieting.” In general, we recommend looking at the article, “[How Fast Should You Lose Weight When Cutting?](#)” For now, because we can look at rates of muscle loss with harder objective numbers, let’s start there.

A 2021 meta-analysis by Murphy and Koehler found that losses in lean mass increased as the size of daily energy deficits increased. With energy deficits smaller than about 500 Calories per day (which would equate to losing about 1lb or 0.5kg per week), subjects (on average) were able to experience a bit of body recomposition (losing fat, while gaining a little muscle). With deficits larger than 500 Calories per day, subjects tended to lose lean mass, with the rate of lean mass loss increasing as energy deficits grew. For most people, this would result in a rate of weight loss of about 0.5–0.8% of body weight per week.



From Murphy and Koehler (2021)

If your main priority is to lose fat as quickly as possible while retaining your fat-free mass, a rate of weight loss of around 1lb or 0.5kg per week, or around 0.6–0.7% of body weight per week should typically do the trick. But, assuming you don't want to teeter right on the edge of preserving vs. losing muscle mass, keeping a slightly wider range in mind can offer more flexibility without making the diet excruciatingly slow, and without virtually guaranteeing that you'll lose a lot of muscle.

So, for most people, most of the time, a rate of weight loss in the range of 0.25–1% of body weight per week, or between 0.5–1.5lb (0.25–0.75kg) per week should be the default. As you get closer to 1%, 1.5lb, or 0.75kg, your rate of fat loss will be a bit faster, but you may lose a bit of muscle in the process. At rates closer to 0.25%, 0.5lb, or 0.25kg, your diet may take a bit longer, but you can be very confident that you'll be able to maintain your muscle mass, or [potentially even gain a little bit of muscle as you diet](#).

As one final note, I'd caution against scaling percentages of body weight infinitely. Aiming to lose 1% of body weight per week is a slightly aggressive but totally reasonable rate of weight loss for most individuals, but it can be very aggressive and result in very large energy deficits for heavier people.

We think a rate of weight loss of about 2lb or 1kg of body weight per week serves as a good "upper limit" for most people, most of the time. Once daily energy deficits begin exceeding 1000 Calories per day, diets tend to get quite unpleasant and unsustainable for the vast majority of people.

You can use the table below ([or the cutting calculator at the top of this page](#)) to help inform your decision making. But, if you don't have a strict timeline for when your diet needs to finish up, we'd generally recommend opting for a "Conservative" to "Moderate" rate of weight loss, since it will help you feel better, maintain (or even build) muscle mass, and preserve your energy levels and performance throughout your cut.

For weight loss goals, our general recommendations can be summarized in this table:

## Recommended rates of cutting

|                                    | Very conservative | Conservative | Moderate  | Slightly aggressive | Aggressive |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|-----------|---------------------|------------|
| Percentage of body weight per week | 0.10%             | 0.25%        | 0.5–0.75% | 1.0%                | 1.5%*      |
| Relative energy deficit            | <5%               | 5–10%        | 10–20%    | 20–30%              | >30%       |

\* We'd recommend to keep your rate of weight loss below 2 pounds or 1 kilogram per week. Regardless of bodyweight, that's a quite aggressive rate of weight loss.

If your Calorie targets feel too aggressive or more than you're comfortable sustaining, that's a sign to make adjustments. Your targets are tied to the rate of weight change you selected, so if aiming for rapid weight loss requires you to eat less than feels realistic, [consider slowing down your target rate](#). Choosing a more moderate pace often makes the process easier to stick with and more sustainable in the long run. Lastly, consider giving [this article a read](#) if you feel your Calorie targets are too low for you.

## Determining your macronutrient requirements

Macronutrients are the three major energy-containing nutrients in your diet: protein, fat, and carbohydrate.

All three provide energy, but they serve distinct dietary roles.

Protein *can* be metabolized for energy, but its *main* function is contributing to the growth, maintenance, and repair of your body's tissues. If your body *needs* energy that can't be provided from fat and carbohydrate, it'll burn protein in a pinch, but it prefers to rely on the other two macronutrients. Metabolizing protein yields *about* 4 Calories of energy per gram of protein.

Carbohydrate provides your body with a "fast" energy source. It's your body's preferred fuel source during intense exercise, because your body can break it down faster than fat, and fully metabolizing carbohydrate requires less oxygen than fat (and oxygen delivery to your muscles is a major limiter of exercise performance). Carbohydrate also serves to help maintain blood glucose levels. Finally, fiber – a specific class of carbohydrate – is important for digestive health, and it helps you feel full for longer after eating. Metabolizing non-fibrous carbohydrate (i.e., starches or sugars) yields *about* 4 Calories of energy per gram of carbohydrate.

Fat provides your body with a "slow" energy source. It's your body's preferred fuel source at rest and during low-intensity exercise. Adequate fat intake is also important for hormone production, and for the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, and K). Metabolizing fat yields *about* 9 Calories of energy per gram of fat.

## Determining the protein requirements for your goal and lifestyle

Of the three macronutrients, protein is the most important for influencing the body composition outcomes you achieve when gaining *or* losing weight. You *can* gain or lose weight on a low-protein diet. However, when losing weight, you'll lose a relatively higher proportion of lean

mass and less fat mass, and when gaining weight, you'll gain a relatively higher proportion of fat mass and less lean mass.

Protein needs vary based on the type of exercise you perform, because exercise heavily influences protein turnover. If you engage in resistance training, your body needs protein to repair muscle damage, help you recover from exercise, and synthesize new muscle tissue as a training adaptation. If you do endurance training, your body needs protein to help you repair muscle damage and recover from exercise, but protein needs are a *bit* lower because you do not need additional protein in order to build more muscle. Finally, if you don't exercise at all, you don't *need* as much protein, because the protein you consume mainly serves to facilitate normal daily protein turnover; it's not needed for exercise recovery or building more muscle.

Rather than provide protein recommendations in terms of grams per pound or per kilogram of total body mass, we tend to prefer recommendations based on grams per pound or kilogram of fat-free mass. The reason is straightforward: your fat-free mass is where the vast majority of daily protein turnover takes place.

If two people weigh 200lb, but one of them has 180lb of fat-free mass, and the other has 140lb of fat-free mass, the protein requirements for the person with 40 more pounds of fat-free mass will most likely be considerably higher. So, the biggest drawback of providing recommendations in terms of grams per pound or kilogram of total body mass is that people with more body fat can wind up with unnecessarily high protein targets, which can crowd out the other macronutrients.

With all that said, total-body-weight estimates will do in a pinch if you don't have a way to calculate fat-free mass. For most people, a daily intake of about 1.6–2.2g of protein per kg of body weight (roughly 0.73–1.0g per lb) will cover the vast majority of needs, assuming regular resistance training. Leaner or more active individuals may benefit from the higher end of that range, while those with higher body-fat levels can stay closer to the lower end.

## General recommendations are as follows for cutting:

|                                          | Lowest recommendation | Typical recommendation | Highest recommendation |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| No exercise                              | 1.4g/kg FFM           | 1.7g/kg FFM            | 2g/kg FFM              |
| Only endurance training                  | 1.8g/kg FFM           | 2.1g/kg FFM            | 2.4g/kg FFM            |
| Lifting, or lifting + endurance training | 2g/kg FFM             | 2.5g/kg FFM            | 3g/kg FFM              |

|                                          | Lowest recommendation | Typical recommendation | Highest recommendation |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| No exercise                              | 0.65g/lb FFM          | 0.75g/lb FFM           | 0.9g/lb FFM            |
| Only endurance training                  | 0.8g/lb FFM           | 0.95g/lb FFM           | 1.1g/lb FFM            |
| Lifting, or lifting + endurance training | 0.9g/lb FFM           | 1.15g/lb FFM           | 1.35g/lb FFM           |

**When you're setting up your program in MacroFactor, these recommendations correspond to the "low," "moderate," and "high" protein options.** We also bump these recommendations up slightly (by 0.1g/kg, or 0.45g/lb) if you have a weight loss goal, for a bit of additional insurance against muscle loss.

You can think of the "low" option as a "good enough" recommendation for people who prefer a lot of dietary flexibility. You *could* probably get *some* more benefits from eating a bit more protein, but you'll get *most* of the benefits of protein consumption, while leaving plenty of Calories for fats and carbohydrates.

The "moderate" option is our general recommendation. It should provide the vast majority of the benefits you could get from protein consumption, while still allowing for *some* dietary flexibility. You can think of it as the average optimal intake. *Some* people may benefit from consuming even more protein, but any benefits of additional protein consumption will likely be very small.

The "high" option is the highest level of protein intake that *could potentially* lead to additional benefits for *some people*. We don't think most people necessarily *need* to consume quite this much protein, and beyond this point, we're confident that consuming even more protein is very unlikely to yield additional benefits. You can think of this as a "better safe than sorry" protein target.

If setting up your program in MacroFactor, you'll also see a "very high" protein option. We generally don't recommend selecting this option. We think it's unlikely to yield body composition benefits beyond what could be achieved with a "high" intake, and *most people* will feel and perform better by conserving additional Calories for fat and carbohydrate intake, rather than allocating even more Calories to protein. But, if you simply have a preference for very high protein intakes, it's an option that is available to you.

## Distributing carbs and fats

Carbohydrate and fat targets are calculated after determining your protein targets, because fat and carbohydrate intake aren't *quite* as important as protein for optimizing body composition outcomes.

So, for example, if your Calorie target is 2000 Calories per day, and your protein target is 150g of protein, 600 Calories (150g x 4 Calories per gram) are already being "reserved" for protein. So, the other 1400 Calories can be distributed to fat or carbohydrate. We recommend calculating macronutrient targets this way, instead of using a percentage-based approach for all macros (for example, 40% protein, 30% carbs, 30% fats), because percentage-based approaches can lead to

protein intakes that are either way too high or way too low if your overall Calorie targets get very high or very low.

*Most people* don't need to worry too much about specific fat and carbohydrate targets. You can typically just lump them together as nutrients that primarily serve to provide energy, without concerning yourself *too much* about which nutrient you're getting the energy from. In the example above, you could get 400 Calories from carbs and 1000 Calories from fat, 1000 Calories from carbs and 400 Calories from fat, or 700 Calories from both, and still be just fine.

So, we *typically* recommend preference-based allocations of fat and carbohydrate. If you prefer eating fattier foods, allocate more of your remaining Calories to fat, and fewer to carbohydrate ([low-carb and high-fat macro program](#), or [keto macro program](#)). If you prefer eating a lot of fruits, veggies, and starches, allocate more of your remaining Calories to carbs, and fewer to fats ([high-carb and low-fat macro program](#)). Finally, if you don't have a strong preference between the two (or if you just don't want to pay much mind to your specific fat and carb targets), select a [balanced macro program](#).

With that said, there are certain medical conditions for which a lower-carb program may be preferable (that's a conversation to have with your doctor or a registered dietitian). Furthermore, if you do a lot of higher-intensity cardiovascular exercise, a higher-carb plan may be advisable. But, beyond those two circumstances, we'd broadly recommend preference to drive your decision of fat versus carb targets.

## **Making necessary adjustments as you see how your body responds to your diet**

Once you have your initial program, it's time to start tracking, monitoring, and adjusting. **Again, MacroFactor will make these adjustments for you.** But, it's still helpful to know *how* and *why* these adjustments work. This will help you understand your recommended program updates, and help you understand how to monitor and adjust your diet moving forward, even if you don't keep using MacroFactor long-term (but, once you see how convenient it is to offload this decision-making to the app, we're confident you'll want to stick with it).

For starters, you should *expect* that you'll need to make dietary adjustments over time, for two major reasons.

The first and most obvious reason for this is that your initial Calorie targets will probably be "wrong," at least to some degree. *Initially* estimating energy expenditure from factors like height, weight, age, sex, and activity levels [is an inexact science](#). Your initial recommendations may be a

few hundred Calories too high or too low. That's *why* MacroFactor's coaching algorithms exist in the first place – they adjust intake targets based on your *actual* energy intake and *actual* weight changes, which can allow you to estimate energy needs *far* more accurately.

The second reason is that your energy needs change over time. As you gain or lose weight, it simply requires more energy to fuel a larger body, and less energy to fuel a smaller body. Weight loss, in particular, can cause *additional* decreases in energy expenditure, referred to as [“metabolic adaptation.”](#) In essence, your body “slows down” a bit to preserve energy when it perceives itself to be in an energy-sparse environment. Changes in activity levels can also alter energy requirements. So, Calorie and macro targets that are “correct” today will likely be too high or too low in a month or two, *especially* if you're succeeding in gaining or losing weight at your desired rate.

So, *how* can you make the necessary adjustments to your nutrition targets to keep you on track toward your goals?

You just need to regularly [monitor your weight](#) and [energy intake](#). Your rate of weight change will reveal how large of an energy deficit you're in. When combined with your energy intake data, you can then calculate how much energy you're burning, how much your energy expenditure has changed, and how much your Calorie and macro targets need to increase or decrease.

Here's a simple illustration:

Let's assume you have a goal of losing 1lb per week. This would require an average daily energy deficit of 500 Calories per day. You believe your energy expenditure is 2500 Calories per day. So, to lose 1lb per week, you aim to consume 2000 Calories per day.

However, when eating 2000 Calories per day, you may find that you're only losing 0.5lb per week. This rate of weight loss implies that your daily energy deficit is only 250 Calories per day. So, that means you're burning around 2250 Calories per day, not 2500. Furthermore, it means that if you want to lose 1lb per week, you'll need to reduce your Calorie target to 1750 Calories per day.

When you reduce your Calorie target to 1750 Calories per day, your rate of weight loss picks up to your desired rate of 1lb per week. But, you'd prefer being able to eat a bit more, so you increase your level of exercise a bit. When you do so, your rate of weight loss increases from 1lb per week to 1.2lb per week. This now implies that your daily energy deficit has increased from 500 to 600 Calories per day. Since you're still consuming 1750 Calories per day, this means your energy expenditure has increased from 2250 to 2350 Calories per day. Furthermore, this means that if you want to stick with your goal of losing 1lb per week, you can increase your Calorie target to 1850 Calories per day.

This process of monitoring your weight, monitoring your energy intake, and making adjustments based on that data is the bedrock of any (competent) diet coaching process.

This is something you can absolutely do for yourself, but the benefits of using MacroFactor to make these adjustments are two-fold.

## **The benefit of using MacroFactor for this process versus going at it manually**

The first benefit is that this simple concept belies a surprisingly difficult analytical challenge ([which you can read about here](#)). The strength of using weight and nutrition data to estimate energy expenditure and adjust Calorie targets is that there's a clear signal in the data that conforms to well-understood physiological principles: If you're burning more energy, you'll gain less weight or lose more weight at any given level of energy intake. The biggest drawback to this approach is that there's a LOT of noise obscuring that signal. For example, when you're truly weight-stable, it may still look like you gained 1lb this week, lost 2lb the next week, re-gained 1lb the week after that, etc. If you responded to all of those short-term weight changes, your Calorie targets could jump around by 500+ Calories per week. But, on the flip side, being too cautious about overreacting to this noise could make you far too slow to respond to *actual* changes in energy expenditure.

But, this certainly isn't an impossible analytical challenge. And, it's one we've devoted more time and brainpower to solving than anyone else.

The second benefit is that turning these decisions over to MacroFactor can help you avoid the pitfalls of what we like to refer to as "diet brain."

Diet brain is the voice in the back of your head that overthinks and second-guesses everything:

"Has my weight actually plateaued, or am I just retaining water?"

"I decreased my Calorie targets two weeks ago? Is it really time to reduce them again?"

"My weight is actually higher this week; do I need to slash my Calorie targets by even more than normal?"

"I feel like I may be losing weight too fast; do I need to increase my Calorie targets to avoid losing muscle? If so, how large should the increase be?"

“I’m going to start a new training program next week; I know my energy expenditure will change, but I don’t know how much I’ll need to adjust my Calorie targets.”

In theory, it should be easy to take a step back, look at your data objectively, and make appropriate, dispassionate adjustments over time. In practice, some people find this process easy, and some people find it to be nearly impossible. This process may also require some additional effort. It doesn’t just require that you record your weight and nutrition data — it also requires doing a significant amount of ongoing data analysis to decide when to adjust your Calorie targets, and to decide how large those adjustments need to be. As a result, a *lot* of people hire nutrition coaches for \$50–200/month, primarily for the purpose of having a second set of eyes to make dispassionate Calorie adjustments to keep them on track toward their goals.

MacroFactor handles all of this for you with data-driven, objective adjustments, so you can focus on showing up and putting in the work.

## **Building a complete nutritional strategy**

If you’re approaching this as a short-term diet phase, you can realistically see great results by focusing mostly on your Calorie and protein targets. We could say that meticulously hitting every micronutrient guideline while eating a wide range of nutrient-dense foods will dramatically change your body composition in a matter of weeks, but that wouldn’t be entirely accurate. In the short term, weight and body composition outcomes are almost entirely driven by exercise, energy balance, and adequate protein intake.

That said, especially if your goal is weight loss, building your meals around minimally processed foods with plenty of fruits and vegetables — and choosing options with relatively low energy density — will make it easier to stay on track [while keeping hunger in check](#). And the benefits of a nutrient-rich diet extend well beyond satiety or [micronutrient intake alone](#).

This guide focuses mainly on total energy and macronutrient intake because those are the most critical factors for short-term results. But if you use this time to practice eating more nutrient-dense, high-satiety foods (like fresh fruits, roasted or steamed vegetables, beans and peas, boiled potatoes, and lean protein sources), you’ll set yourself up to maintain and build on your progress long after this phase ends.

## **Appetite management strategies**

The most difficult and obvious factor affecting the ability to hit lower targets is that people get hungry. To some degree, we have to accept a bit of hunger while in a deficit. But you can do a lot

to lessen it with some planning and self-experimentation. Here's a general overview of what increases satiety:

## **Strategies for increasing fullness and decreasing caloric intake**

**Incorporate low-energy foods:** Include vegetables, lean proteins, and legumes in as many meals and snacks as possible to boost satiation and satiety. These foods are nutrient-dense, low in Calories, and high in volume, helping you feel full without consuming too many Calories.

**Balance macronutrients:** Avoid focusing on a single macronutrient. Combine fiber, protein, and fat — especially from whole foods that are low in energy but high in volume — to enhance satiation and satiety. A balanced mix of these nutrients helps stabilize blood sugar and provides sustained energy.

**Limit processed foods:** Processed or ultra-processed foods are often high in Calories but low in essential nutrients and volume, leading to overeating and reduced satiety.

**Mindful eating and harder textures:** The texture of harder foods requires more chewing, which can increase feelings of fullness and satisfaction. Mindful eating helps you recognize hunger and fullness cues, preventing overeating and improving digestion.

The above alone can make a notable difference in your satiety levels. However, it's worth looking at a few extra details to round out the advice.

## **Stacking your meal, starting with lean proteins**

If you master one thing during a deficit (or really for health and body composition in general), make it building a catalog of lean protein sources that work for you. They should meet your cost, convenience, and enjoyment needs, and serve as the foundation for how you plan meals.

After determining your lean protein source, add fibrous vegetables or fruits and include some unsaturated fats. Those three factors — protein, fiber, and unsaturated fats — are the base for building any meal. From there, you can add more starch-based vegetables or fruits, and finally simple sugars or saturated fats as needed. This keeps meal design simple but flexible.

| Protein sources per 100 Calories |                              |           |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|
| Food Item                        | Protein per 100 Calories (g) | Vegan (V) |
| Tuna (Light, Water Pack)         | 22.6                         |           |
| Whey Protein                     | 22.0                         |           |
| Cod                              | 21.7                         |           |
| Egg Whites                       | 21.0                         |           |
| Soy Protein                      | 20.0                         | (V)       |
| Chicken Breast                   | 19.9                         |           |
| Shrimp                           | 19.1                         |           |
| Scallops                         | 18.5                         |           |
| Non-fat Greek Yogurt             | 18.2                         |           |
| Pork Loin                        | 17.6                         |           |
| Seitan                           | 16.0                         | (V)       |
| Spirulina                        | 15.0                         | (V)       |
| Low Fat Cottage Cheese           | 14.4                         |           |
| Nutritional Yeast                | 14.0                         | (V)       |
| Lean Ground Beef                 | 13.6                         |           |
| Turkey Breast                    | 13.4                         |           |
| Mushrooms                        | 13.0                         | (V)       |
| Spinach                          | 12.9                         | (V)       |
| Tofu                             | 12.0                         | (V)       |
| Peanut Butter Powder             | 11.1                         | (V)       |
| Tempeh                           | 10.6                         | (V)       |
| Edamame                          | 10.3                         | (V)       |
| Lentils                          | 7.9                          | (V)       |
| Kidney Beans                     | 6.8                          | (V)       |
| Black Beans                      | 6.7                          | (V)       |
| Chickpeas                        | 5.4                          | (V)       |

### Carbohydrate and fiber sources per 100 Calories

| Food           | Fiber (grams per 100 Calories) | Notable Micronutrients          |
|----------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Bran (Wheat)   | 24.0                           | Iron, Magnesium, Selenium       |
| Bran (Corn)    | 22.0                           | Iron, Magnesium, Selenium       |
| Mustard Greens | 12.2                           | Vitamin K, Vitamin C, Vitamin A |
| Collard Greens | 11.5                           | Vitamin K, Vitamin A, Calcium   |
| Seaweed        | 10.5                           | Iodine, Vitamin K, Folate       |
| Artichokes     | 9.0                            | Copper, Magnesium, Folate       |
| Chickpeas      | 7.0                            | Folate, Manganese, Thiamin      |
| Raspberries    | 6.5                            | Vitamin C, Manganese, Vitamin K |
| Blackberries   | 8.0                            | Vitamin C, Vitamin K, Manganese |
| Lentils        | 7.9                            | Folate, Manganese, Iron         |
| Edamame        | 5.2                            | Folate, Iron, Manganese         |

| Fat sources per 100 Calories |                                       |                     |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Food                         | Grams of food or oil per 100 Calories | Leading type of fat |
| <b>Polyunsaturated Fats</b>  |                                       |                     |
| Chia Seeds                   | 20 g                                  | Omega-3 (ALA)       |
| Flaxseeds                    | 20 g                                  | Omega-3 (ALA)       |
| Walnuts                      | 16 g                                  | Omega-3, Omega-6    |
| Salmon                       | 55 g                                  | Omega-3 (EPA, DHA)  |
| Sunflower Seeds              | 18 g                                  | Omega-6             |
| Soybean Oil                  | 11 g                                  | Omega-6             |
| <b>Monounsaturated Fats</b>  |                                       |                     |
| Avocado                      | 60 g                                  | Oleic Acid          |
| Hazelnut                     | 16 g                                  | Oleic Acid          |
| Almonds                      | 18 g                                  | Oleic Acid          |
| Olive Oil                    | 11 g                                  | Oleic Acid          |
| <b>Saturated Fats</b>        |                                       |                     |
| Coconut Oil                  | 11 g                                  | Lauric Acid         |
| Butter                       | 14 g                                  | Palmitic Acid       |
| Cheese, cheddar              | 25 g                                  | Stearic Acid        |
| Beef, ground                 | 50 g                                  | Stearic Acid        |

## Supplements

You don't need to use any supplements to be successful. Supplements make, at most, a small impact on your results.

If you *are* interested in supplements, however, there are only three that I could recommend with a high degree of confidence: creatine, protein, and caffeine.

Creatine is the only supplement we'd recommend to *basically* everyone. It's dirt cheap, [helps you build more muscle](#) over time, and may even have positive effects on [cognition](#). For its effects on muscle growth, 3–5g per day is sufficient.

Protein is an as-needed supplement. If you don't already consume enough protein from other foods in your diet, [supplementing with additional protein](#) can help you build more muscle, and [potentially lose more fat](#) as well. If you *do* already consume enough protein from other foods in your diet, there's no need to use a protein supplement. However, even if you generally consume enough protein from other foods in your diet, it doesn't hurt to have a tub of protein powder handy to serve as an insurance policy for the rare days when you *would* otherwise fall short of your protein goal.

There's consistent evidence showing that [caffeine can improve exercise performance](#) when dosed appropriately (around 3mg/kg). However, be mindful about consuming too much too late in the day, since it can negatively impact sleep. An ergogenic dose of caffeine [consumed in the afternoon](#) will *probably* have at least *some* impact on your sleep. Caffeine is *most* useful for people who work out in the morning. Exercise performance is generally a bit worse in the morning than in the afternoon, but caffeine can make it a bit easier to get going in the morning, and can help close the gap between morning and afternoon performance. Furthermore, caffeine consumed before a morning workout is unlikely to impact your sleep. But, much like protein, caffeine is an as-needed supplement. If you don't feel like you need caffeine to perform well, we probably wouldn't recommend that you go out of your way to take it.

There are plenty of other supplements on the market, but these three have the most evidence supporting their effectiveness for promoting changes in body composition and exercise performance, along with strong track records for safety. And, of these three, creatine is the only one we'd strongly recommend to virtually everyone. As mentioned above, protein and caffeine *can* also be helpful, but only on an as-needed basis.

## Fleshing out related goals and aims

While not strictly necessary, we'd strongly encourage you to think a bit more about your goal. *Why* are you trying to lose fat? How do those goals relate to your deeper drives, your self-concept, and your vision of your future? What other goals or habits could support (or hinder) your pursuit of your fat loss goals?

Addressing long-term behavior change is well beyond the scope of this guide, but we'd strongly recommend that you check out [this article on Accomplishing Goals Through Sustainable Behavior Change](#). Some of the concepts *may* help you start off a positive long-term change, instead of a short-term sojourn before you slip back into a lifestyle that doesn't serve your goals.

It can also be very helpful to focus on *process goals* in addition to your *outcome goal*. So, if your goal is to lose weight, what daily actions or behaviors can help increase your odds of achieving that outcome?

For example, you might set a goal of prepping meals once a week, or a goal of sleeping 8 hours every night, or a goal of working out at least 4 days per week. By setting (and achieving) goals related to the processes that are required to achieve your desired outcome, you greatly increase your chances of attaining that desired outcome.

## Step 3: Planning your exercise

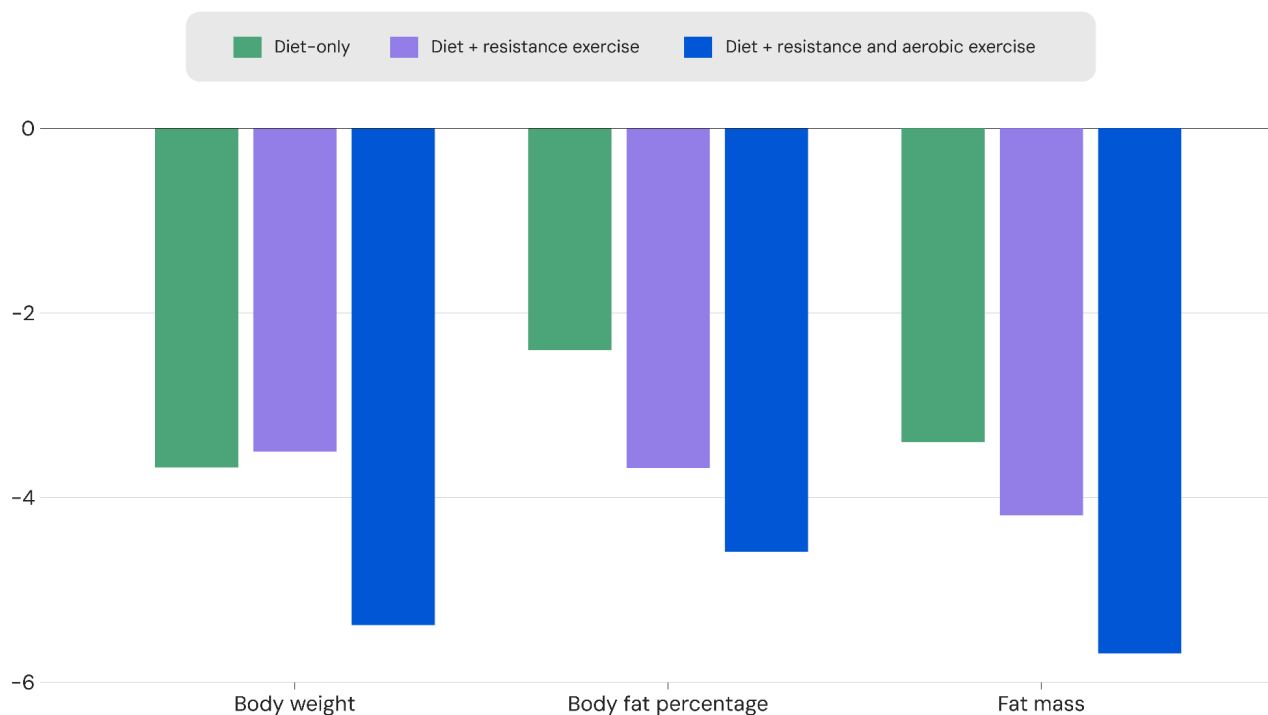
Exercise dramatically impacts the *composition* of the weight you lose, as you'll lose more fat and less muscle. There are, however, *many* more benefits of exercise: [less depression and anxiety](#), better [cognitive performance](#), [greater longevity](#), better [bone health](#), better [metabolic health](#) ... and that's still just scratching the surface.

Resistance training and cardiovascular training both have a role, but of the two, resistance training is *probably* more important. The combination of aerobic and resistance training is [about twice as effective](#) as either aerobic or resistance training in isolation.

Resistance training is the primary stimulus for preserving muscle in an energy deficit. Without resistance training, around 20–30% of the tissue you lose will be lean mass. With resistance training, on the other hand, you can lose 100% fat mass when losing weight (depending on your rate of weight loss).

However, aerobic exercise also has a role. For example, a classic [study by Marks and colleagues](#) found that diet plus resistance exercise led to slightly larger losses in fat mass and body fat percentage than diet alone, and the additional inclusion of aerobic exercise led to even more fat loss.

### The addition of aerobic exercise helped increase fat loss



There are two major reasons why aerobic training is likely to boost your results.

First and foremost, doing some aerobic exercise helps ensure that your *total* activity levels aren't too low, which is important if you have a relatively sedentary job and lifestyle outside of the gym. [Research suggests](#) that activity levels help regulate appetite. At *most* activity levels, appetite and energy expenditure are tightly *coupled*. That means that your natural hunger cues will encourage you to eat *about* as much energy as you're burning. However, at very low activity levels, appetite and energy expenditure become *uncoupled*, meaning that your natural hunger cues encourage you to eat *more* energy than you're burning. This is a major reason why sedentary lifestyles promote weight gain.

So, doing some aerobic training will ensure that your activity levels are high enough to land yourself in the range where your energy expenditure and hunger cues are appropriately coupled.

Second, aerobic exercise helps train your body to burn fat more effectively. Exercise promotes increases in [metabolic flexibility](#), meaning that your body has an easier time switching between burning fat or carbs as its primary fuel source. Metabolic *inflexibility* is primarily characterized by an overreliance on carbohydrate metabolism, and a bit more difficulty burning fat. With metabolic inflexibility, you're more likely to have fluctuating energy levels, because once you burn through the carbohydrate you consumed at your last meal, you struggle to tap into the vast energy reserves in your fat tissue. This may be one of the reasons for appetite dysregulation in people with low activity levels — they feel like they need to eat more to keep their energy levels up. Furthermore, once your carbohydrate reserves are running low, you'll be more likely to start breaking down protein as a major fuel source, instead of smoothly switching over to a heavier reliance on fat oxidation.

Both aerobic and resistance training promote increases in metabolic flexibility, but they do so through slightly different means. Simply building more muscle via resistance training increases metabolic flexibility, because muscle tissue is a major site for glucose disposal and fat oxidation. Aerobic exercise amplifies these benefits by improving the metabolic function of the muscle tissue you already have (and, obviously, the metabolic function of any additional muscle that you build).

So, we'd *recommend* doing a combination of aerobic and resistance training. Though, doing either one will be a big step up over not exercising at all.

In terms of implementation, keep things simple. If you're using this guide for exercise recommendations, I'm going to *assume* that you don't have much exercise experience (with resistance training, aerobic training, or both). If you *are* already exercising regularly, you probably already know what you're doing, and you already have a training routine that you're following. So,

I'm writing this with the assumption that you're fairly new to aerobic training, resistance training, or both.

Also note that there are *plenty* of good workout routines you could follow. These are just general recommendations following the 80/20 principle (trying to point you to training that will yield most of the potential benefits, while minimizing the risk of injury or burnout).

## Resistance training

Most successful workout routines will have you training most major muscle groups about twice per week. Both higher and lower frequencies can certainly work, but they involve more careful planning of weekly recovery.

For your first week or two of workouts, primarily focus on controlling the weights, lifting with good form, and acclimating your muscles to working out, without pushing yourself *too* hard. If you don't have any recent training experience, pushing yourself to failure on every exercise can lead to an ungodly amount of muscle soreness and very long recovery times. But, just a week or two of somewhat "easy" workouts can [help acclimate your muscles](#) so that you experience dramatically less soreness once you start pushing yourself.

So, for the first week, start with very light weights, build up gradually, and move on to the next exercise once you find a weight that feels somewhat challenging. For the second week, try doing 2 sets with the load you worked up to in week 1. For week 3, do 3 sets with the same load, but continue the last set until you either a) fail to complete a rep, or b) you don't think you could complete another rep with good form. Based on your performance in this set to failure, potentially increase your weights for your next workout.

## An illustration of week-to-week training implementation

In week 1, you try dumbbell bench press. Start very light for the first set: 5lb for women, and 10 or 15lb for men. Do 10 reps.

Did that feel pretty easy? If not, this will be your working weight for week 2. If it did feel easy, go up to the next heaviest set up dumbbells (which will either be 2.5 or 5lb heavier) and do another set of 10 reps. Repeat this process until you find a weight that feels somewhat challenging, but that *doesn't* require an all-out effort to complete the set. If you're unsure, I'd recommend playing it conservatively. Remember, week 1 is just for getting your feet wet.

Let's assume that the weight you ended with was 20lb per hand.

In week 2, you'd do one warm-up set with 10lb, and then do 2 sets of 10 reps with 20lb.

In week 3, you'd do one warm-up set with 10lb, then 2 sets of 10 reps with 20lb, followed by one more set with 20lb until you either feel like you couldn't complete another rep with good form, or until you fail to complete a rep. Again, err on the side of caution. Sometimes failing a rep catches you by surprise, but try to be mindful of stopping the set when you feel like your form is starting to get shaky.

How did you do in this final set? If you complete 12 or more reps, go up in weight the next time you do dumbbell press (*probably* to 25lb dumbbells, unless your gym has 22.5s). If you completed fewer than 12 reps, stick with the same weight for your next dumbbell press workout.

In week 4, be aware of the fact that the jump from 20 to 25lb is a fairly large increase in weight, relatively speaking. So, you *may* not complete all 10 reps in your first two sets. You may get 10 reps in set 1, 8 reps in set 2, and 5 or 6 reps in set 3. That's totally fine! If you fail to complete all of the reps, just stick with 25lb until you complete all three sets, and you get at least 12 reps in your final rep-out set. You don't need to increase your weights each week, but you *should* try to beat your prior performance. So, if you got 10, 8, and 6 reps in your three sets in week 4, completing sets of 10, 10, and 7 reps in week 5 would still mean you're making progress.

## Understanding compound, isolation, and training splits

We'd recommend that you put most of your effort into *multi-joint compound exercises*.

Compound exercises will allow you to effectively train multiple major muscle groups at once.

Single-joint "isolation" exercises can also be effective (and, once you have some more training experience, they *may* even be slightly more effective for certain muscles), but working all of your major muscle groups with single-joint exercises is also way more time-consuming. For instance, a bench press simultaneously works your pecs, triceps, and anterior deltoids. If you wanted to get the same benefits from single-joint exercises, you'd need to do one exercise for your pecs, another exercise for your triceps, and another exercise for your anterior deltoids. Again, there's absolutely no problem with doing three isolation exercises instead of one compound exercise if that's what you prefer, but *primarily* focusing on compound exercises is far more time-efficient. If there are certain muscle groups you'd particularly like to focus on, you can get the most bang for your buck by doing compound exercises for *most* muscle groups, while adding some isolation exercises for 1-3 specific muscle groups at the end of your workouts (for example, if you want to focus on building your arms, you could do 3 sets of biceps curls and 3 sets of triceps extensions near the end of one or two of your workouts each week).

Most compound exercises can be categorized as upper body pushing exercises, upper body pulling exercises, quad-dominant lower body exercises, and hip-dominant lower body exercises.

**Upper body pushing exercises** train the triceps, shoulders, and (generally) the pecs. Examples include bench press, push-ups, dips, incline press, and shoulder press.

**Upper body pulling exercises** train the biceps, forearms, and upper back muscles. Examples include pull-ups, pull-downs, and rows.

**Quad-dominant lower body exercises** *primarily* train the quads and adductors (inner thigh muscles), while often training your hamstrings, glutes, and lower back muscles to a lesser degree. Examples include squats, leg press, lunges, and step-ups.

Finally, **hip-dominant lower body exercises** *primarily* train the glutes, hamstrings, and lower back muscles, while often training your quads and adductors to a lesser degree. Examples include deadlifts, good mornings, hip thrusts, and back raises.

To structure your training week, anywhere between two and four training sessions is great (obviously you *can* lift weights even more frequently, but that's probably unnecessary if you're just starting out). Training twice per week will mean fewer days where you need to carve out time to work out, but your workouts will take a bit longer. Conversely, training four times per week will mean more training days, but shorter workouts. Here's how your training week might look with two, three, or four workouts per week:

| Two-Day Template                         |                                          |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Day 1                                    | Day 2                                    |
| Upper body pushing exercise 1            | Upper body pushing exercise 2            |
| Upper body pulling exercise 1            | Upper body pulling exercise 2            |
| Quad-dominant lower body exercise 1      | Quad-dominant lower body exercise 2      |
| Hip-dominant lower body exercise 1       | Hip-dominant lower body exercise 2       |
| 1-2 isolation exercises of your choosing | 1-2 isolation exercises of your choosing |

In this two-day template, you'll be doing a full-body workout on both days. The upper body exercises come first, because lower-body exercises tend to be more tiring. Doing upper-body exercises first tends to have minimal impact on subsequent lower-body exercises, but doing lower-body exercises first can negatively impact your performance on subsequent upper-body exercises. Finally, I'd recommend picking different exercises for both days. For example, you may do dumbbell bench press for your upper body pushing exercise on day 1, and machine incline press for your upper body pushing exercise on day 2. This bit of advice applies to the other templates as well.

The three-day template also employs a mix of upper- and lower-body training in each workout but you only have 2-3 compound exercises per workout, instead of 4.

| Three-Day Template                       |                                          |                                          |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Day 1                                    | Day 2                                    | Day 3                                    |
| Upper body pushing exercise 1            | Upper body pulling exercise 2            | Upper body pushing exercise 2            |
| Upper body pulling exercise 1            | Quad-dominant lower body exercise 1      | Quad dominant lower body exercise 2      |
| Hip-dominant lower body exercise 1       | Hip-dominant lower body exercise 2       | 1-3 isolation exercises of your choosing |
| 1-2 isolation exercises of your choosing | 1-2 isolation exercises of your choosing |                                          |

With a four-day template, there's enough flexibility to decide whether you want to have alternating upper body days and lower body days, or whether you'd prefer doing some upper body and some lower body training in all workouts. With just two compound exercises per workout, these sessions will be *very* manageable. With fewer compound exercises, you also have more time and flexibility to work in additional isolation exercises, if you'd like to.

For most exercises, just do 3-4 sets of 5-12 reps, terminating each set when you feel like you could only do about one more rep with good technique. Each week, either aim to add 2.5kg (or 5lb) or 1-2 reps per set to ensure progress. You won't always make measurable progress in all sets of every exercise each week, but as long as you keep effort levels high, you should make consistent progress over time.

| Four-Day Template – Option 1  |                                     |                               |                                     |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Day 1                         | Day 2                               | Day 3                         | Day 4                               |
| Upper body pushing exercise 1 | Quad-dominant lower body exercise 1 | Upper body pushing exercise 2 | Quad-dominant lower body exercise 2 |
| Upper body pulling exercise 1 | Hip-dominant lower body exercise 1  | Upper body pulling exercise 2 | Hip-dominant lower body exercise 2  |
| 1–3 isolation exercises       | 1–3 isolation exercises             | 1–3 isolation exercises       | 1–3 isolation exercises             |

| Four-Day Template – Option 2        |                                    |                                     |                                    |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Day 1                               | Day 2                              | Day 3                               | Day 4                              |
| Upper body pushing exercise 1       | Upper body pulling exercise 1      | Upper body pushing exercise 2       | Upper body pulling exercise 2      |
| Quad-dominant lower body exercise 1 | Hip-dominant lower body exercise 1 | Quad-dominant lower body exercise 2 | Hip-dominant lower body exercise 2 |
| 1–3 isolation exercises             | 1–3 isolation exercises            | 1–3 isolation exercises             | 1–3 isolation exercises            |

It's worth noting that these are all fairly minimalistic templates. They should only require *about* 90–120 minutes of total training time per week (depending on how many isolation exercises you do, and how long you rest between sets). Once you get about 4–5 weeks of training under your belt, you may decide that you'd like to add a few more exercises or do a couple more sets of each exercise, and that's *totally* fine.

Finally, I'd like to note that you *don't* necessarily need to get a gym membership to engage in resistance training. You can make great gains with [just your body weight](#), or with some very basic at-home equipment. Just note that body weight exercises are often progressed by adding reps or progressing to more challenging versions of the exercise, rather than by adding weight. For example, if you're doing push-ups instead of bench press, you might start by doing push-ups on your knees, and add reps until you can do sets of 20 reps. From there, you might progress to push-ups in a plank position. When you make the transition, you might be able to do sets of 8 reps, and you'd once again progress by adding reps until you can do sets of 20 reps. From there, you might elevate your feet to do decline push-ups (which are a bit harder than push-ups with

your feet on the floor). So, body weight training *does* force you to get a bit more creative, but it can still be very effective.

Simple takeaways for resistance training:

1. We'd strongly recommend that you do some resistance training.
2. Try to work all major muscle groups around twice per week.
3. Go easy in your first week or two. Really pushing yourself won't yield better results, but it *will* leave you horrendously sore while you're trying to build the habit of lifting consistently.
4. Focus on beating the logbook. Each time you do the same exercise again, try to either increase the weights you're lifting, or try to do at least one or two more reps than last time.
5. For the most part, use loads that are challenging for sets of about 6–20 reps. If you're struggling to complete just 3 or 4 reps, go a bit lighter. If it takes 40 reps for a set to become challenging, go a bit heavier.

## Aerobic training

The effectiveness of your resistance training can have a pretty big impact on the body composition outcomes you achieve, but *most* of the benefits of aerobic exercise (outside of health outcomes) come from simply doing some aerobic exercise. So, high-level, we'd recommend that you have 2–4 sessions of aerobic training per week, with each session lasting between 20–40 minutes.

Any mode of aerobic exercise will fit the bill: jogging, cycling, rowing, swimming, using an elliptical, incline treadmill walking, using a stair-stepper machine, etc.

For the most part, focus on lower-intensity aerobic training. If you have a way of monitoring your heart rate, staying between about 120–135 beats per minute is a good zone to aim for. Otherwise, try to stay right on the threshold of the intensity that would allow you to hold a conversation. If you're going slow enough that your breathing rate isn't being affected at all, go a bit faster. If you're gasping for breath and know you couldn't chat with another person, slow down a bit.

This lower-intensity training zone gives you a great cost/benefit ratio. It's intense enough to yield positive aerobic adaptations, but it's not so intense that it will dramatically impact your recovery from resistance exercise.

If you *want* to take a structured approach to your aerobic training, you can build up your total training time week-over-week. For example:

Week 1: Two 20-minute sessions

Week 2: Two 25-minute sessions

Week 3: Two 30-minute sessions

Week 4: Two 35-minute sessions

Week 5: Two 40-minute sessions

Week 6: Three 30-minute sessions

Week 7: Three 35-minute sessions

Week 8: Three 40-minute sessions

Week 9: Four 35-minute sessions

Week 10: Four 40-minute sessions

Weeks 11-14: Stick with four 40-minute sessions, but continue to increase your pace at the rate your gains in aerobic fitness allow.

To be clear, you don't *need* to work your way up to four 40-minute sessions. What we'd recommend is focusing primarily on your resistance training, and then finding the amount of aerobic training you can comfortably fit into your weekly schedule. Even if that's just two 20-minute sessions per week, that's still excellent.

If you're doing both aerobic and resistance training, it's *best* to separate your resistance training and aerobic training sessions by as much time as possible. It's ideal to do your resistance and aerobic training on different days, if your schedule permits it. The next best option is to do your aerobic and resistance training on the same day, but to separate your workouts by at least four hours (for example, taking a jog before work, and then hitting the gym after work). If you have to do your aerobic and resistance training in the same workout, your best bet is to do your resistance training first, followed by your aerobic training (this is still a *great* option). The only setup we *wouldn't* recommend is doing your aerobic and resistance training in the same workout, starting with your aerobic training, and then doing your resistance training afterwards.

Finally, just as a word of caution, we *wouldn't* recommend trying to do a *ton* of aerobic training specifically for the purpose of increasing your energy expenditure. We wrote about some of the drawbacks of that strategy [here](#), but the basic reasons are simple.

First, this can lead to an adversarial relationship with exercise — it's something you just have to grit your teeth through so that you can either eat more, or lose weight faster. That's generally not a recipe for developing the sort of healthy enjoyment of exercise that yields long-term success.

Second, burning more energy through exercise usually *reduces* the amount of energy you burn [throughout the rest of the day](#) (this is referred to as “energy compensation”). So, doing a ton of additional cardio doesn’t actually wind up increasing your energy expenditure by as much as you’d expect (and this is *especially* true when you’re [trying to lose weight](#)).

Finally, doing a reasonable amount of aerobic training (2–4 sessions of 20–40 minutes apiece, as recommended in this guide) [won’t negatively impact](#) your ability to gain or preserve muscle mass, but excessive cardio can make it harder to build muscle at best, or directly contribute to muscle loss at worst.

Simple takeaways for aerobic training:

1. Doing some aerobic training will help improve body composition outcomes, and may help with appetite regulation.
2. You don’t need to do an excessive amount of aerobic training to reap the benefits. 2–4 sessions, each lasting 20–40 minutes, should be sufficient.
3. Keep intensity fairly low, but not too low. Aim for a heart rate of around 120–135 beats per minute. If you don’t have a way to monitor your heart rate, try to maintain a pace that would put you near the limits of your ability to hold a conversation.

## Step 4: Documenting your progress

This section of the guide will give you a brief overview of how to document your body recomposition progress. Note that you don't *have* to track anything other than your weight and nutrition data to get the benefits of the MacroFactor recommendations, but you'll likely find it motivating and perhaps even helpful in determining if a time has come for you to move more strictly into a cutting or bulking phase.

### Progress photos

Progress photos can be very helpful for evaluating your progress over time. As you try to lose fat or build muscle, visual changes occur quite gradually. Even for those experiencing very rapid body composition changes in a general sense, you'll still look *basically* the same day to day, so it can be difficult to notice and appreciate the progress you're making. However, when you compare a contemporary photo of yourself with a photo taken a couple months ago, you'll be able to readily see changes that you wouldn't have noticed otherwise. Furthermore, if you have goals related to aesthetic outcomes, a visual indicator of progress provides you with the [most direct feedback](#) you could hope for.

We go into more depth on this topic in [the article \*Tips for Taking Good Progress Photos\*](#), but here are a few highlights:

#### 1. Take progress photos about once per month.

Weekly progress photos tend to have the same issue as looking in the mirror every day since your appearance doesn't change that much week to week. Try to take progress photos once every 4 weeks to give yourself enough time to notice meaningful changes, but not so long that you can't adjust your strategy if needed.

#### 2. Make sure the photos are consistent.

To provide you with reliable visual feedback on how your body is changing, your progress photos should be as similar as possible from photo to photo. Here are some factors to consider:

- **Time of day:** Take photos at a consistent time, ideally in the morning before eating or drinking, to avoid bloating and hydration differences.
- **Location:** Use the same backdrop each time. A plain wall works best for consistent lighting and perspective.
- **Attire:** Wear similar clothing for each photo to make comparisons clear.

- **Lighting:** Take photos in the same spot with similar lighting conditions. Be consistent about using flash.
- **Camera distance:** Stand the same distance from the camera each time. You can crop photos so your body fills the frame consistently.
- **Body positioning:** Match your posture and stance in each set. Decide whether to flex or relax, and do it the same way every time.

### 3. Evaluate objectively but compassionately.

When you review progress photos, aim to be both objective and compassionate. It's easy to focus on the areas you'd like to change, but also take time to recognize and appreciate the improvements you've made.

### 4. Look further back sometimes.

Most body composition goals take months or even years to achieve, and progress often happens gradually. Looking back at how far you've come can remind you that slow progress is still progress and help you stay motivated through longer phases.

## Body circumference measurements

If you want a more detailed look at how your body is changing beyond what the scale or your clothes can show, body circumference measurements can help.

There are three principles to keep in mind when taking body measurements:

1. **Frequency:** Repeat measurements with regular intervals that are short enough to provide timely feedback, but long enough that you can reasonably expect changes over repeated measures.
2. **Reliability:** Measurements should be taken in a repeatable manner, so that changes over time reflect true circumference changes, instead of just changes in measurement location or technique.
3. **Relevance:** Take measurements that are meaningful to you and your goals.

We go into more depth on this topic [in the article \*Tips for Taking Good Body Measurements\*](#), but here are a few quick highlights:

### Frequency

For most people, most of the time, we'd recommend taking measurements every week, every two weeks, or every month. Measuring weekly, every two weeks, or every month provides the ideal balance – you won't get distracted or discouraged by day-to-day fluctuations, but you also won't be flying blind without sufficiently timely feedback on your goal progress.

## **Reliability**

Here are some tips for taking reliable body measurements:

### **1. Take measurements under the same conditions each time.**

The two primary considerations are intestinal contents and muscle swelling. For waist measurements, we'd recommend measuring first thing in the morning, before you've eaten. For other circumference measurements, muscle swelling after an intense workout can affect circumference measurements up to half an inch (1-1.5cm). So, we'd generally recommend measuring circumferences when the muscles under the measuring tape aren't noticeably sore.

### **2. Be consistent about whether you flex your muscles, or leave them relaxed.**

It's totally fine to flex muscles that are under the measuring tape, and it's also totally fine to keep your muscles relaxed. However, once you decide whether you want to measure limb circumferences with flexed or relaxed muscles, you should stick with that decision.

### **3. Make sure you measure at the same locations each time.**

Circumference measures can change quite a bit based on the location of the measuring tape. So, for reliably tracking changes over time, it's important to make sure you're consistent about the location of your circumference measurements.

### **4. Practice and average.**

As a practical recommendation, I'd suggest practicing circumference measurements until five consecutive measurements fall within a 0.5cm range for smaller circumference measurements (arm, leg, and neck circumferences), and within a 1cm range for larger circumference measurements (shoulders, chest, waist, and hips).

Once you can take good, reliable measurements, I'd still recommend taking at least two measurements at each measurement site each time you assess body circumferences. If you get identical measurements back-to-back, you can confidently log that measurement. If you get slightly different measurements, take a third measurement, and average the two closest values.

### **5. Optionally, use a spring-loaded measuring tape.**

Applying consistent pressure is key for taking reliable circumference measurements. By varying how tightly you squeeze the measuring tape, you can significantly alter a circumference measurement.

## **Relevance**

You have the option of recording up to 18 different circumference measurements in MacroFactor.

If you just like having more data for the sake of having more data, there's certainly nothing wrong with tracking all 18 different body circumferences. However, I'd *generally* recommend focusing on a smaller selection of circumference measurements that actually matter to you. That way, recording body measurements will be less of a chore, and all of the data you collect will be meaningful and actionable.

If the measurements you take provide you with reliable, actionable insights about your progress toward a goal or outcome that matters to you, you'll find it easier to consistently take high-quality measurements.

## **Clothing fit**

If you're not too interested in taking body measurements, a simpler way to accomplish the same purpose is assessing how your clothes fit over time. If clothes that used to be tight through the stomach or hips (depending on where your body stores fat) are now loose, that's a good indication that you're losing fat.

## **Resistance training performance**

If you already have some resistance training experience, your lifting performance will give you a good indication of your body composition progress.

If you're losing weight but you can still lift the same weights for the same number of reps in exercises you consistently perform, that's a pretty good indication that you're maintaining your muscle mass, and predominantly losing fat.

## Subjective sensations

Especially when you're losing weight, it's common to feel hunger, experience low energy levels, and get a bit cranky. This is a totally normal part of weight loss. You can mitigate these effects to some extent by keeping your energy deficit moderate, eating more satiating foods, getting plenty of sleep, and maintaining an active lifestyle. However, you *do* need to anticipate and accept these sensations as an unavoidable part of the process.

With that in mind, it can be helpful to document how you're feeling. Record your mood, energy levels, and sensations of hunger at regular intervals (daily or weekly work best). A simple 0–10 scale will get the job done.

Since these are subjective ratings, they can mean slightly different things to different people. For example, if you're a "glass half full" person, your "normal" mood rating may be an 8 or 9, with 10 reserved for particularly great days, and a 5 or 6 would represent a noticeable dip. Conversely, you may center the scale at 5, such that 5 is a normal day, and 7 or 8 would be a really good day, and a significant dip in mood could be represented by a 2 or 3.

As you track these ratings, watch for trends. For example, when your hunger levels reach an 8 and your energy levels reach a 4, you may find that you're far more likely to be tempted to deviate from your diet. Or, you may find that when you increase your rate of weight loss from 1 to 1.5lb per week, your mood rating immediately drops by 2 or 3 points.

Once you spot these sorts of trends, you can use them to make decisions about your diet. For example, if your energy levels are high and your hunger is low at a particular rate of weight loss, you could use that as an indication that you may be able to increase your target rate of weight loss (if that's something that interests you). Or, if the situation was reversed, you could use that as an indication that you should consider reducing your rate of weight loss a bit, or potentially consider spending a week or two on maintenance Calories to give yourself a break.

## Step 5: Setting up for your next phase

If you've been cutting for a while, you'll eventually reach a point where it makes sense to reassess and decide what's next. Even if your original plan was just to lose fat, there's a good chance your next phase will involve building muscle, shifting into body recomposition, or taking a short maintenance break before continuing. Knowing when to pivot keeps you moving forward instead of stalling.

The goal isn't to stay in a deficit forever. It's to use each phase intentionally. With consistent nutrition data, progress photos, weight trends, and training logs, you'll have the information you need to make that decision confidently.

## Diet breaks

If you were in a deficit for an extended period and had very few instances of eating at maintenance Calories, it might be a good idea to take some time off before diving into another round if you're not done tackling more fat loss.

The length of time for a break and the reasons for your break are other important factors to consider. Generally speaking, diet breaks can offer mental and physical relief from being in a consistent deficit. Many of the effects you may have experienced during the deficit — such as fatigue, lethargy, or decreased performance — can dissipate simply by returning to maintenance. You could also see a small positive effect in [disinhibition](#) (the tendency to overeat) and maybe even [slight bumps in energy expenditure](#) returning to a state closer to maintenance.

## The importance of continuing to log your food

Any change in body composition comes down to your ability to navigate total daily energy expenditure and the balance between surpluses and deficits. There are various ways to determine total daily energy expenditure. Mindfulness and intuitive eating are certainly valid methods, and if they work for you, that's great. However, if you're concerned about regaining the fat you lost, you might find logging helpful to keep an eye on your overall Calories and energy expenditure.

Studies show that [logging can be advantageous](#) in achieving maintenance or staying aware of your eating behaviors at a deeper level. I should note that logging doesn't have to be overly aggressive or intense. Logging can be as simple as taking a moment once a week to record your estimated intake along with a few daily weigh-ins. This small amount of effort could pay off by alerting you to increases (or decreases) in trend weights that may affect your maintenance goals.

In the end, you want to make sure the fat loss journey you went through is something you can sustain, not just something you experienced once before drifting back to where you started. Continuing to log, even in a low-effort way, gives you the feedback you need to keep informed.

## Closing and recap

At its core, fat loss is about reducing stored energy in a sustainable, minimally disruptive way while maintaining muscle mass. If you've worked through the steps in this guide, you're set up for a successful cut and ready to transition into recomposition, muscle gain, or maintenance in the future.

Here's a cheat sheet to keep at the front of your mind:

**Determine your energy expenditure first.** Whether you estimate it manually or let MacroFactor calculate it for you, knowing roughly how much energy you burn sets the stage for everything else.

**Create a Calorie deficit.** Fat loss happens when you consistently consume less energy than you use. This doesn't require extreme restriction, just a manageable, sustained deficit.

**Choose an appropriate pace.** Aiming to lose about 0.25–1% of your body weight per week balances steady fat loss with muscle retention and makes the process easier to sustain over time.

**Prioritize protein and resistance training.** Consuming roughly 1.6–2.2g of protein per kilogram of body weight and lifting regularly will help you preserve lean mass, improve body composition, and make your cut more effective.

**Adjust as you go.** Monitor weight trends and make small changes to intake or activity as needed. MacroFactor can automate this, but understanding how and why adjustments work helps you stay in control.

**Manage hunger strategically.** Base meals around lean protein, fiber-rich plants, and minimally processed foods to stay full without adding unnecessary Calories. Small choices here can make the process far more sustainable.

**Track progress beyond the scale.** Photos, circumference measurements, and strength markers reveal changes the scale may not capture, keeping you motivated and informed.

**Focus on building lasting habits.** A well-run cut is just one phase of a larger process. Use it to develop the skills, routines, and awareness that will support maintenance, recomposition, or future bulks long after the diet ends.