

A GUIDE TO DIET SUSTAINABILITY

FROM PEOPLE'S ATHLETIC CLUB

**CALORIES
& MACROS**

SLEEP

DIGESTION

ENVIRONMENT

RELATIONSHIP

DISCOMFORT

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INTRODUCTION

My goal for this book was to distill years of nutrition coaching experience into as few words as possible. As a result, some concepts will present as generalities. Rather than providing caveats in these instances, I'll state the following: there is no perfect diet and on an individual level almost any diet can work well for any person. The adage applies, the best diet is the one you'll follow. Rather than providing a diet, I present principles in the form of a pyramid that will work well for most people, most of the time. The pyramid is not structured by order of importance. Each layer provides support for the next, creating the conditions for success from bottom to top.

At first glance, the pyramid may look virtuous rather than science oriented. Given that actual weight loss or gain cannot physiologically occur without a calorie deficit or calorie surplus, most would assume it should be the base of the pyramid. However, after more than a decade of coaching, some patterns have emerged that changed my view of weight loss and gain.

Unless performed for sport, event, work, etc. there is little to no value in purposeful weight loss or gain if it is not lasting. In the coming chapters, I will review the role of each layer of the pyramid in creating lasting change.

The book finishes with a sample meal plan.

DISCOMFORT

The most important variable for creating a change in body composition is the mental framework you bring to it. Our expectations shape our reality. You will need to expect, accept, and embrace discomfort.

Hunger is a species-wide experience. It is not always an emergency and does not always require immediate attention. As with many uncomfortable experiences, your resistance to it is often worse than the actual feeling. Hunger is routinely forgotten about during periods of creativity, stimulating conversations, or while playing sports. Whether these are distractions or simply more gratifying than fulfilling the hunger is circumstantial. However, if you are in the habit of always gratifying the urge to eat, you become disconnected from your body's hunger cues. What you perceive as hunger may instead be habitual (time of day, after dinner, sugar cravings, etc.) OR emotional (boredom, stress, anxiety, depression). Food is mood-altering and often people simply want to be in a different mood. Take time to reflect on if you are hungry or if food is being used as a coping strategy. You should eat with purpose, most of the time.

A tolerable level of discomfort (not pain or any form of suffering) is the goal. This is not a test of how tough you are. When experimenting with any change to your diet you should ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does this diet support my health and fitness goals?
2. Can I eat this way most of the time for a very long time?

If the answer isn't yes to both of those questions, keep experimenting. While experimenting, keep the following in mind:

The easiest path is fruitless. The hardest path is unsustainable. Sustainable improvements are made from tolerable levels of discomfort.

FOOD RELATIONSHIP

Food can play many different roles in our lives. It can be a source of pleasure, fuel for exercise, an expression of culture, and a source of nourishment, among many others. From a physiological perspective, however, food serves to satisfy hunger and your body's need for essential nutrients.

So, how many of your food choices should be derived from pleasure versus providing your body with the nutrients? There is no exact right ratio. It is individualized and goal dependent. An 80/20 ratio works well as a starting point. Meaning that 8 out of 10 meals should be consumed with the primary purpose of providing your body with nutrients. Enjoying your meal and it being an ideal source of nutrients are not mutually exclusive. However, the structure of the meal should be designed around the nutrients, not the pleasure you'll get from them.

3 meals/day = 21 meals/week. 80/20 rule means 4 meals/per week can be pleasure oriented

Pleasure and nutrition are not the only experiences that come from food. Unfortunately, many people experience negative emotions based on their food choices, such as shame and guilt. There is much to be said on this topic but arguably most important is that negative emotions do not serve you. Negative emotions are not a sustainable source of motivation. Guiltting yourself into a better body composition or health is not an aspirational way to live. These negative emotions are often rooted in assigning certain foods a label of good or bad. A better dichotomy to describe food is in terms of health promotion. Some foods, based on their nutrient content, are more health-promoting than others. If you commonly experience negative emotions based on your food choices then the first step is to become aware of your internal dialogue, recognize it does not serve you, and over time work to give less and less energy to those thoughts.

To experience lasting body composition change, developing a healthy relationship with food is of primary importance. A healthy relationship recognizes that the primary value of food is in the nutrients it provides. The majority of your meals should be consumed because of their nutritional value, rather than the pleasure derived from them.

Perhaps ironically, the longer you eat for nutrient value, the more your body craves those foods rather than the ones you currently associate with pleasure.

FOOD ENVIRONMENT

Food environment is made up of the food that is most accessible to you. This includes the food within your home, at your place of work, access to grocery stores and restaurants, etc. Of the most consequence is the food in your home.

You cannot eat food you cannot access. By stocking your home with foods that align with your goals, you eliminate the need for willpower. You make better choices by default, not by choice. If left to choose, you are human. You may open the cupboard and resist the chips the first time, or even the second, but the fifth? Even if you're able to resist, you are consciously choosing to restrict yourself which carries a heavy burden.

I'm not assigning chips a label of good or bad. They may work for your diet but as rule, they're a commonly overeaten food that provides little health-promoting value.

You may have less control over your food environment because of children, spouse, etc. While potentially more challenging, you can circumnavigate this with meal preparation. Meal preparation is your most powerful tool for exerting control over your food environment.

Simplify your meal preparation by choosing three to four meals for each breakfast, lunch, and dinner. These meals don't have to be eaten in perpetuity. Some of your ingredients should change depending on what foods are in season. This may feel restrictive for some (freeing for others), however, it is much more aligned from an evolutionary perspective. The expectation of ever-changing food options is a late 20th-century experience.

There is nothing inherently wrong with variety. For most, simplicity equals consistency. Ever-changing meals add a layer of complexity to your diet.

Your ability to create lasting body composition change should not rely on willpower. Avoid relying on your willpower by ensuring that your default choices align with your goals. Control your default decisions by preparing your meals.

SLEEP

I've helped people lose weight with poor sleep habits and I've helped people put on muscle with poor sleep habits. None of these people, however, have maintained those body composition changes. This is because insufficient sleep has many physiological effects that make sustaining weight loss or muscle gain unrealistic.

Insufficient sleep can slow down your metabolism, increase your appetite (with the release of the hunger hormone: Ghrelin), and increase the loss of muscle tissue. Put simply, without enough sleep you will burn fewer calories during the day, you will be hungrier, and you will lose muscle. This combination is counter-productive to any goal but is only significant if poor sleep becomes your norm. One or two nights of poor sleep should not become a source of stress for you. Focus on meeting the following sleep guidelines for the majority of nights:

- 7 - 9 hours of sleep
- Consistent sleep and wake times
- Avoid eating and drinking at least 2 hours before bed
- The room should be dark and cold (less than 70 degrees Fahrenheit)

The mistake clients make most often is thinking that going to bed at 11 pm and waking up at 6 am equals 7 hours of sleep. The amount of time you're in bed and the amount of sleep had is referred to as your sleep efficiency. For adults, a sleep efficiency of 85 percent is considered good. Assuming your sleep efficiency is good, 7 hours in bed is equal to 5.95 hours of sleep. To ensure 7 hours of sleep, you need to be in bed for a minimum of 8 hours. The remaining guidelines address sleep quality. Sleep quality is measured by the amount of REM (rapid eye movement) and deep sleep you get each night.

REM sleep is impacted by your circadian rhythm and is particularly subject to consistent sleep and wake times. Insufficient REM sleep is strongly associated with daytime fatigue and drowsiness. If you do not feel refreshed upon waking and/or find your energy dipping midday then commit to finding a consistent 8-hour window (minimum) you can be in bed.

Deep sleep is measured by a decrease in blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing rates. By avoiding food and drink 2 hours before bed your body doesn't have to work to digest, allowing you to reach a state of deep sleep sooner. By keeping your room dark and void of screens or other light sources you remove stimulants that otherwise impact deep sleep. Optimal temperatures vary but somewhere between 64-69 degrees Fahrenheit is best.

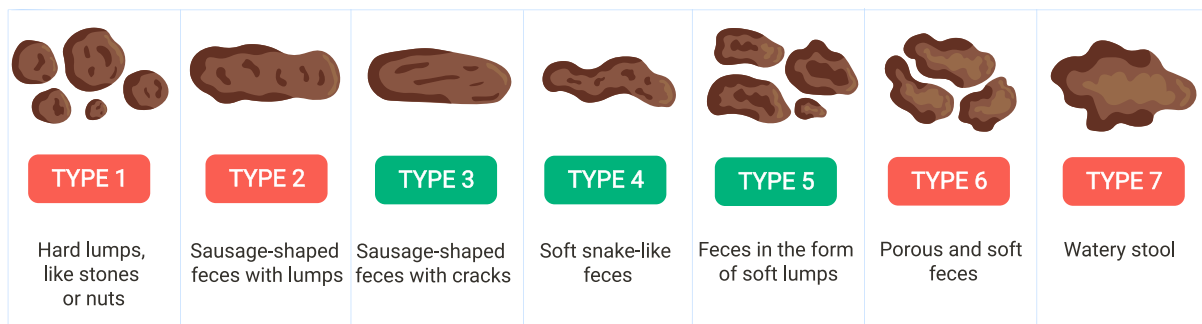
A perfect diet paired with poor sleep is unsustainable. A good diet paired with good sleep is an everlasting well of results.

DIGESTION

Your digestive health has many far-reaching implications. Research has shown links between GI (gastrointestinal) discomfort and chronic diseases such as IBS (irritable bowel syndrome), IBD (inflammatory bowel disease), obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cancer. Emerging research is showing links to conditions such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, anxiety, depression, and many others. While much of this research is new, it is clear we cannot separate our digestive health from our mental and physical health.

When questioned, many of my clients are unsure what foods, if any, cause them GI discomfort. Experiences such as bloating, gas, and irregular bowel movements have become such a norm that we don't think them notable. This isn't just a matter of comfort. Our ability to properly digest food directly correlates with our ability to make use of the nutrients from that food. If you have a goal of losing body fat or putting on muscle then you need to prioritize your digestive health.

In addition to how certain foods make you feel, your bowel movements provide valuable insight into your digestive health. Familiarize yourself with the Bristol Stool Chart to understand what your bowel movements indicate.



In order to be mindful of how certain foods affect you, you need to be deliberate about what foods you're eating. Reviewing the ingredient list of packaged foods, preparing your own meals, and minimizing ingredients are all good first steps. Common offenders of GI discomfort are not necessarily intuitive, the FODMAP chart below can provide guidance. FODMAP is an acronym that stands for fermentable short-chain carbohydrates - of which there are different variations. Not everyone has the gut bacteria needed to break down FODMAPs efficiently. This chart details which foods contain high levels of FODMAPs and are therefore more likely to cause GI discomfort. It's important to note that you may digest many, if not all, of these foods without issue.

HIGH FODMAP FOODS

FODMAPs explained



OLIGOSACCHARIDES (Fructans and Galacto-oligosaccharide(GOS))	DISACCHARIDE (Lactose)	MONOSACCHARIDE (Fructose)	POLYOLS (Mannitol, Sorbitol, Xylitol, Isomalt)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FRUITS SUCH AS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ RASPBERRIES ◦ GRAPEFRUIT ◦ DATES ◦ CURRANTS ◦ RIPE BANANA • VEGETABLES SUCH AS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ GLOBE ARTICHOKE ◦ LEEK ◦ ONION ◦ GARLIC ◦ BRUSSEL SPROUTS • LEGUMES SUCH AS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ BORLOTTI BEANS ◦ ADZUKI BEANS ◦ BLACK BEANS ◦ KIDNEY BEANS ◦ LIMA BEANS ◦ NAVY BEANS ◦ SOYBEANS • BREADS AND CEREALS SUCH AS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ BARLEY ◦ SPELT FLOUR AND KERNELS ◦ WHITE BREAD ◦ WHEAT GERM ◦ WHEAT PASTA • NUTS SUCH AS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ ALMONDS ◦ CASHEWS ◦ PISTACHIOS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MILK PRODUCTS SUCH AS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ COW MILK ◦ GOATS MILK ◦ SHEEP MILK ◦ ICE CREAM ◦ YOGURT ◦ SOUR CREAM • CHEESES SUCH AS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ CREAM CHEESE ◦ BRIE CHEESE ◦ CAMEMBERT ETC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EXCESS FRUCTOSE FRUITS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ APPLES (ALSO CONTAIN POLYOLS) ◦ PEARS (ALSO CONTAIN POLYOLS) ◦ CHERRIES (ALSO CONTAIN POLYOLS) ◦ MANGO • EXCESS FRUCTOSE VEGETABLES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ ASPARAGUS (ALSO CONTAINS FRUCTANS) ◦ JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE (ALSO CONTAINS FRUCTANS) ◦ BROCCOLI (STALKS) ◦ BROCCOLINI (HEADS) ◦ SUGAR SNAP PEAS • EXCESS FRUCTOSE SWEETENERS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ AGAVE SYRUP LIGHT ◦ AGAVE SYRUP DARK (ALSO CONTAINS FRUCTANS) ◦ HIGH FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP ◦ HONEY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EXCESS POLYOLS FRUITS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ APPLE (ALSO CONTAINS EXCESS FRUCTOSE) ◦ PEAR (ALSO CONTAINS EXCESS FRUCTOSE) ◦ CHERRIES (ALSO CONTAIN EXCESS FRUCTOSE) ◦ APRICOT ◦ AVOCADO ◦ BLACKBERRIES ◦ LYCHEE ◦ NECTARINE (ALSO CONTAIN EXCESS FRUCTANS) ◦ PLUM (ALSO CONTAIN EXCESS FRUCTANS) ◦ PRUNE (ALSO CONTAIN EXCESS FRUCTANS) • EXCESS POLYOLS VEGETABLES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ CAULIFLOWER ◦ CORN (SWEET) ◦ CELERY ◦ SWEET POTATOES ◦ SAUERKRAUT (WHITE) ◦ MUSHROOMS • SUGAR-FREE PRODUCTS (CANDY, CHEWING GUM ETC.)



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Like every layer of this nutritional pyramid, better - not perfection, is the goal. Discovering which foods are optimal requires experimentation. Slowly compile the foods that make you feel great and minimize those that don't. It is also the case that sometimes the GI discomfort is worth it (date night, birthdays, holidays, etc.) but it should be a choice you make, not a mysterious occurrence.

CALORIES & MACRONUTRIENTS

The mechanism of fat loss is eating fewer calories than you burn in a day. The makeup of those calories is your macronutrients, proteins, carbohydrates, and fats. The conditions that allow you to sustainably eat fewer calories than you burn in a day are detailed in the previous layers of the nutritional pyramid.

All calories are the same in the fact that a calorie is a unit of energy. All calories are not the same in the nutrients they provide, how satiating they are, and how they affect your body composition. For example, the amount of protein you eat will directly affect the amount of muscle you lose, retain, or build. When you are deliberate about what you put into your body, the importance of macronutrients becomes self-evident. While calories dictate weight loss and weight gain, the macronutrients will dictate the experience as well as fat loss and muscle gain.

How many calories you burn in a day (TDEE = total daily energy expenditure) can be roughly calculated with a few different algorithms. The accuracy is dependent on knowing two variables; lean mass versus fat mass (body fat percentage) and your activity level (average step count, exercise frequency, sedentary norms). Your activity level changes day to day so how many calories you burn in a day will too. It's not important to have an exact number. It is important to assign calorie and macronutrient prescriptions based on your estimated TDEE and then adjust based on the results.

You can access my free [TDEE Calculator](#) by logging onto peoplesathleticclub.com or simply clicking [here](#).

It's important to repeat that these numbers are estimates. Allow your results to determine how accurate or inaccurate these estimates are. Maintain your calorie targets for a minimum of 2 weeks and then make 5 percent adjustments as needed.

Weighing and tracking all of your energy intakes should not be done in perpetuity. You should not obsess about getting your macronutrients and calories exactly right. Rigidity is not sustainable. Use tracking as a tool to develop an understanding of how to structure your diet, somewhere between 6-12 weeks then return to it as needed, generally 1-2 times per year. The days matter less than the weeks and the weeks matter less than the months. Focus on trends and averages rather than obsessing about making each day perfect.

PYRAMID IN ACTION

To see what these principles look like in action, I've designed the following flow charts and a sample meal plan. While the flow chart will apply to all, the sample meal plan is an example of what the principles look like for me, which is different than what it will look like for you. When designing your meals they should meet the following criteria:

1. They fit into your calorie and protein targets
2. They are satiating enough to satisfy your hunger
3. The ingredients are easily accessible and simple to prepare week over week
4. They digest well

To simplify your meal preparation you would benefit from the following kitchen tools:

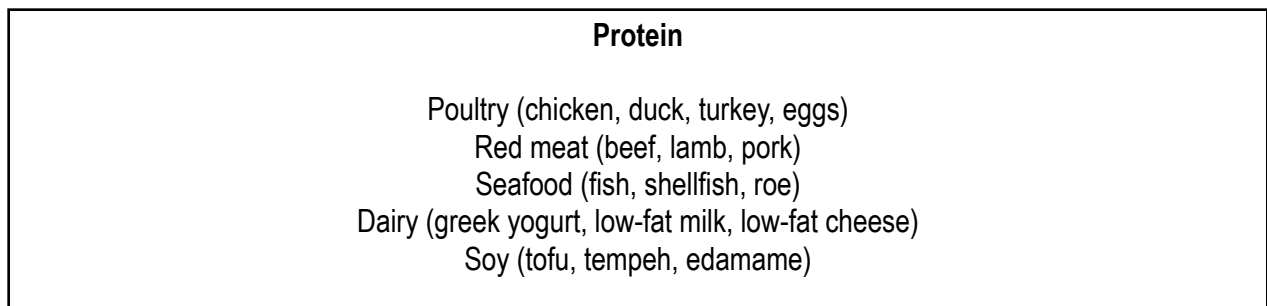
1. Rice Cooker
2. Air Fryer
3. Food Scale

Logistical considerations:

1. Food tracking applications use “raw” weight which will be different than “cooked” weight. The cooking process alters the weight by removing some of the water content.
2. Meat loses approximately 30 percent of its weight when cooked, ie; 7 ounces of cooked chicken is equal to 10 ounces raw. Vegetables are more variable so it is best to measure those raw.
3. Food stores best in air-tight glass containers

Every prepared meal should contain a protein source and most should be accompanied by a carbohydrate, a vegetable, and a fat source. The flow chart is not exhaustive but does help to provide a starting point.

Flow Chart



Carbohydrate

Grains (rice, wheat, maize)
Root Vegetables (potatoes, cassava, plantains)
Legumes (beans, peas, lentils)
Fruits (bananas, apples, strawberries)

Vegetables

Cruciferous (broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kale)
Greens (spinach, micro-greens, romaine)
Nightshades (tomatoes, eggplants, peppers)
Root Vegetables (carrots, beets, onions, squash)

Fat

Protein-derived (fatty cuts of meat; rib-eye, bacon, chicken thigh, salmon, full-fat dairy, etc.)
Oils (olive, avocado, sesame, peanut)
Nuts and Seeds (almonds, pecans, sunflower, pumpkin)
Avocado

Sample Meals

The foods that make up the following meals are not exhaustive of the food flow chart. You should substitute as needed based on the meal design criteria (they fit into your calorie and protein targets, satisfy hunger, are easy to prepare weekly, and they digest well). This current rotation of food makes use of many of the same ingredients for different meals. This allows me to minimize waste and limit cooking time by cooking in large batches. For example, most meals contain 2-4 baby carrots. Carrots are a great source of nutrients and fiber. They are easy to throw on top of any meal you've prepared and help with satiety. If only one of the meals contained carrots in the week, the remainder of the bag would go to waste. On any given day, I will eat three of the meals shown below. Some of the meals are more representative of a traditional breakfast or lunch/dinner, however, I don't distinguish my meals by type as I usually fast until noon.

Shrimp & Rice

100-200 grams of cooked white rice
3-6 ounces of cooked shrimp
1/4-1/2 avocado
2-4 baby carrots
1/4-1/2 cucumber

Ground Beef & Sweet Potatoes

100-200 grams of cooked sweet potato
3-6 ounces of ground beef (90/10 fat)
25-50 grams of broccoli
2-4 baby carrots
.5-1 tablespoon of olive oil (for cooking)

Greek Yogurt

100-200 grams of greek yogurt
50-100 grams of fruit
1-2 tablespoons of nut butter
10-20 grams of honey

Chicken & Butternut Squash

150-250 grams of cooked butternut squash
3-6 ounces of cooked chicken
1/4-1/2 avocado
2-4 baby carrots
1/4-1/2 cucumber

Salmon & Rice

100-200 grams of white rice
3-6 ounces of cooked salmon
1 handful of spinach
2-4 baby carrots
.5-1 tablespoon of olive oil

Overnight Oats

30-50 grams of rolled oats
1/4-1/2 cup greek yogurt
20-30 grams of protein powder (optional)
1 teaspoon cinnamon
Topped with 25-50 grams of fruit
10-20 grams of honey (optional)

Sourdough Sandwich

2 slices of whole wheat sourdough
3-6 ounces of turkey
1/4-1/2 avocado
Lettuce, onion, tomato, cucumber
Mustard
.5-1 tablespoon of mayonnaise (optional)

Protein Smoothie

1/2-1 frozen banana
25-50 grams of frozen blueberries
20-30 grams of protein powder
.5-1 tablespoon of nut butter
1/2-1 cup of milk of choice
1 handful of leafy greens

GET STARTED

Thank you for taking the time to read this ebook. I hope you'll find the information provided useful and that it helps guide you towards diet sustainability. If you need help putting this information to action, a coach from People's Athletic Club would love to help. To get started, please fill out our [questionnaire](#) on our website.

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