THE 99%
In terms of general nutrition, most people are not unique. Instead, there are two main principles of nutrition that people can optimize for fitness and health:
1. food quality (“what to eat”); and
2. food quantity (“how much to eat”).

• Different mainstream diets are just different ways to spin these two concepts. They may also come with some complicated physiological rationale to distinguish themselves and “prove” their value. Don’t buy into it.
• When an individual finds success with a certain diet, it’s usually because the specific rules of that diet best align with their beliefs, goals, habits or lifestyles (not that different physiological principles were at play).
• Specific health conditions may need separate diet recommendations as directed by a healthcare practitioner; this document is not for them.

WHAT TO EAT
Eat whole, unprocessed foods. This is a diet comprised of plant matter (fruits, vegetables (including beans!), nuts) and unprocessed protein sources (meat, fish, eggs). Some may choose to include some minimally processed dairy and/or grain items.

• WHY? Whole, unprocessed foods give you all the nutrients you need to thrive (hello, vitamins and minerals!) while staying away from modern-day ingredients (sugars, vegetable oils, etc.) that are not associated with health. The overarching trend in the nutrition literature is that eating more whole, unprocessed foods results in favorable changes to biomarkers and health outcomes.
• HOW? Buy food that has a shelf-life, buy food without an ingredient list. Stay away from foods you can’t make in your own kitchen.
• DON’T I NEED TO ELIMINATE THINGS? LIKE GRAINS, LEGUMES OR DAIRY? Not necessarily. People can eat foods such as beans (legumes), butter or ghee (dairy) or even minimally processed grains (e.g., quinoa, rice) if it suits their needs. An elimination diet may be a valuable tool for individuals to evaluate food sensitivities.

HOW MUCH TO EAT
Take in just enough food to thrive in whatever activity you choose (which includes the range from inactive to working out multiple times a day). Calories do matter, but it is more useful to understand quantity in terms of macronutrients.

Food can be classified as one of 3 macronutrients (“macros”): protein (e.g., meat), carbohydrate (e.g., fruit, vegetables), and fat (e.g., nuts, oils), based on which macronutrient provides most of its calories. For 99% percent of us (including the active-but-non-professional-athlete-one-workout-a-day-crowd), adopting a diet with a relative balance of these macronutrients is a prudent approach. This approximates a “40/30/30” diet (proposed by Dr. Barry Sears): 40% of the calories come from carbohydrates, 30% from fat, and 30% from protein. A first step in assessing quantity is making the conscious effort to eat macronutrient-balanced meals without weighing and measuring every item.

EXAMPLE MEAL

x3-5 meals/day

Balance Your Macros

PROTEIN

CARBS

FAT

* Generally, 1 cup of higher starch items (e.g., potatoes, corn, yam, banana) and 1 cup of lower starch items (i.e., everything else: most fruits, squash, beets, etc.).
** 1 tbsp for added oil, 1 oz for nuts (about what fits in a cupped hand), or a medium avocado.
*** Regardless of food choices (whole, processed, vegetarian), the generic macronutrient split (see left) can be preserved (fiber was subtracted from the total carbohydrate quantity).

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FAQ

UHHHH... BREAKFAST?
Make it look like another meal! The time of day doesn’t mean your body needs something different.

WAIT, NEVER EAT DESSERT OR DRINK WINE AGAIN?
We didn’t say that! We support sanity! However, the majority of your meals should look like this.

I WANT SPECIFICS.
We all do. But, there are so many factors (genetics, stress, sleep, etc.) that we will likely never know precisely how much each individual “can get away with.” Can you get away with a dessert or cheat meal every day? Is a glass of wine a night ok or too much? We. Don’t. Know. Some people live to 99 years old on a terrible diet, most others do not. The best we can do is eat a high-quality diet in appropriate proportions with some dietary indiscretions sprinkled in for sanity and sustainability.

THIS DOESN’T SEEM LIKE ENOUGH, I’VE READ SO MUCH ON NUTRITION. DON’T I NEED TO DO MORE?
Until most of your meals follow what is outlined on the first page, no. Here’s the thing: getting quality and quantity right is how to optimize all that intricate physiology. For the otherwise healthy population, knowing more about what’s happening on a cellular level doesn’t necessarily change the practical application.

BUT WHAT ABOUT SUPPLEMENTS?
Until most of your meals follow what is outlined on the first page, no. Or yes, if your healthcare provider said so.

BUT WHAT ABOUT POST-WORKOUT SHAKES?
Until most of your meals follow what is outlined on the first page and you are an elite-level athlete working out multiple times a day, no.

BUT I READ AN ARTICLE...
Yep! There ARE lots of interesting articles... But for most us, being consistent with the quality and quantity of the diet is where we will be forever. It is where the overwhelming majority of the benefit comes from and what is very hard to stay consistent with in the long-term. It can even be boring: it’s committing to the fundamentals, forever. It’s figuring out which habits best support consistency with quality and quantity. It is a very iterative process, particularly as goals and beliefs change with time.

I’M VEGETARIAN OR VEGAN.
Great! Eat all the plant matter. Use plant sources to get ~30% of calories from protein. Minimally processed still applies.

I WANT A SIX-PACK.
Except for the genetically lean individuals, most often six-packs come from incredible willpower or from weighing and measuring everything you eat. Re-read that. This is where we lose the majority of people; weighing and measuring IS more work.

WEIGHT AND MEASURE EVERYTHING I EAT? HOW MUCH DO I NEED?
There are lots of calculators to determine your macros. Here’s the punchline: they are all estimates. Instead, assuming your weight is consistent, track what you eat for 3-5 days to get an average baseline number of total calories. Divide your total calories into macronutrients assigning the ratio of your choice (see example below for a 40% carbohydrate, 30% fat, 30% protein split). Hit those numbers every day. Want to lose weight? Reduce total calories by 10%. The “magic” of macros is the consistency they bring to the diet; not that the numbers are that precise to you.

\[
\text{Grams} = \left( \text{Total Calories} \right) \times \left( \text{Percent of Diet} \right) / \left( \text{Calories per Gram} \right)
\]

Example for 2,000 calories / day (replace with your average daily caloric load)

- Protein grams = (2,000) * (30%) / (4 cal/g protein) = 150 g protein
- Carbohydrate grams = (2,000) * (40%) / (4 cal/g carbohydrate) = 800 g carbohydrate
- Fat grams = (2,000) * (30%) / (9 cal/g fat) = 67 g fat

DO I NEED TO ALWAYS EAT MEALS IN BALANCED MACRONUTRIENT RATIOS?
Nope! But eating in balanced macros may result in greater sustainability (try coming up with a meal of 40g protein, 0g fat, and 10g carbohydrate at the end of a day). It also may allow for people to avoid exact weighing and measuring of every item as one’s daily intake often becomes fairly routine.

BUT I DON’T WANT TO WEIGH AND MEASURE.
Yep! It is more work... and one of the reasons for the #800gChallenge. The lazy (wo)man’s metric. Get a whack of protein at each meal and hit 800 grams of fruits and vegetables per day. Don’t obsess about the rest. YMMV. There are many other diets that also try to get around weighing and measuring everything. Essentially, they reduce quantity via some other restriction such as complete elimination of items (e.g., sugar), or restricting eating to certain times (e.g., intermittent fasting), or restricting certain quantities (e.g., low-carb). If you get the results you want, great! Others will eat according to the diet rules and still not have the body composition they want. In this case, it becomes imperative to weigh and measure. Also remember there are diminishing returns on attaining perfection: going from 18% body fat to 15% body fat requires substantially more precision than going from 40% to 37% body fat. There is a reason body-builders weigh and measure steamed chicken and broccoli: everything matters at very low body fat percentages.

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