Guide to Macro Tracking

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Hi there! Thank you so much for purchasing the Guide to Macro Tracking. By the time you finish reading this you should have knowledge on why each macronutrient is important to our health, how to track accurately, common tracking mistakes, and much more.

To disclaim: I am not a registered dietician. However, I have tracked for many years consistently and I've coached many women through the process. I have also been coached on this myself. I believe that my years of tracking and self-education have well equipped me to inform on this topic. I am not giving out any specific advice or macronutrient targets in this guide, but rather providing information on macronutrients and tracking as a whole.

That being said, I hope you find this guide useful. Enjoy!

What are Macros?

Let's start with the basics: The three macronutrients are **protein, carbs and fats**. Every food is broken down into one or multiple of these macros. Each serve benefits to the body and we need all of them:

Protein   4 calories per gram

- Builds, maintains, and repairs muscle
- Produces healthy blood cells and enzymes
- Strengthens immune system

Carbs   4 calories per gram

- Primary energy source
- Fuels heart and central nervous system
- Aids digestion with fiber

Fats   9 calories per gram

- Aids in nutrient absorption
- Important to hormonal health
- Reduces inflammation

As you can see, macronutrients make up your calories. Thus, if you hit your macros for the day, you hit your overall calories by default. Since the process can be intimidating when you first start, I suggest doing a protein goal and an overall calorie goal – having fats and carb goals interchangeable. That way you know you have an optimal amount of protein to recover and maintain muscle and satiety, yet you don't feel overwhelmed by trying to hit three exact macronutrient targets. For example, instead of telling a beginner client to hit 120g protein, 200 carbs and 50 fat, I might just say, "Hey - hit 120g protein and around 1730 calories total."

Benefits to Tracking

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Food Freedom

Numerous different fad diets shame certain foods or macros (i.e. carbs are bad). Even though certain foods contain more vitamins, minerals, and fewer additives, no one food will cause weight gain. If you've come from a background of thinking of foods as good vs. bad, it can feel freeing to understand that you can eat all your favorite foods in moderation and fit them into your day. Having a balance of whole foods that fuel you and foods you crave is key.

Food Education

Before I tracked macros I didn't know which foods were high in protein and I was also shocked to learn how many calories were in a Caesar salad lol. Tracking can open your eyes to show you what you're consuming so you can make progress faster. It can be annoying to feel like you're "eating healthy" but not making progress. While healthy food is GREAT for you, often times portions and lack of knowledge surrounding calorie content can play into these frustrations.

Portion Sizes

Portions sizes and progress are HUGE. When it comes to certain foods, seemingly innocent portions can add 100s of calories easily. It's very easy to think a portion looks like one thing, when in actuality it's much different. This is most common in oils, peanut butters, and nuts. With tracking, you are aware of your portions! Over time when you're no longer tracking macros, you will still have an awareness about what portions look like.

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Finding Maintenance Calories

I know what you're thinking. "Ok this all sounds great but what macros am I even shooting for??" The first step should be to find maintenance calories, or the amount of calories we can intake without gaining ot losing weight. If we know this number, we can reasonably estimate how many calories to eat for a deficit or a surplus.

It is important to know that "maintenance calories" is not a static number - our metabolism adapts up and down as we reverse our calories up or diet down, respectively. This is what makes calculating our maintenance calories somewhat difficult.

What Makes up our Metabolic Rate?
4 Components - A reason why everyone's macros are different

Basal Metabolic Rate

Energy our Body uses to stay alive (breathing and keeping your heart beating)

Non-Energy Activity Thermogenesis (NEAT)

Energy Output not considered exercise (walking to your car, cleaning your house, talking with your hands)

Physical Activity

Walking, running, lifting, etc.

Thermic Effect of Food

Energy your body needs to break down food. Protein has the highest thermic effect of food.

There are two main ways you can go about calculating maintenance: with an online calculator and with a self-calculation method

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Online Macro Calculators

There are tons of online macro calculators out there. A downside to using these is that the numbers are based on an algorithm, not on your personal statistics; they don't know your dieting history or lifestyle. Someone who has just come from years of chronic dieting is going to be in a different place metabolically than someone who is an athlete and has eaten to fuel activity for majority of their life. That's why while it may be easier than the self-calculation method (discussed below), I would take the macros they give you with a grain of salt.
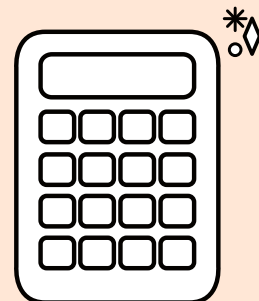
However, there are rules of thumb you can follow specifically when it comes to protein. As a general guideline, have .9-1.2 grams of protein per pound of lean body mass each day. If you're set on using online calculators for your macro targets, I would use 4-5 different macro assignments from different calculators and take the average.

Self Calculation

The second method I'm going to touch on to calculate your maintenance is self-calculation, which is what I do myself and what my clients do when they are first working with me.

How you do this is simply eat normally for two weeks and track your food. Take an average of your caloric intake for the week and stay on those calories just to see how your body responds.

Track your weight and take progress pictures over the following two weeks. This will give us an idea about if you're losing or gaining weight on these calories. From there we can add or drop macros to achieve a caloric surplus or deficit. It's also common that the simple act of starting to track macros consistenctly will yield positive results and have you, your digestion, and energy feeling better.

I prefer this approach because you aren't relying on arbitrary numbers from a calculator, but rather taking data based on you and your habits.

Drawbacks to Tracking Macros

If someone is coming from a background filled with fad diets and labeling food as good or bad, it can be freeing to suddenly be on a plan where all food groups are encouraged. People often feel less restricted. Plus, by tracking you are subconsciously paying attention to what's in food. Even after you've had enough of tracking, you still can take the knowledge you've learned about food and apply it to your habits in everyday life.

However, there are some drawbacks to tracking macros
- Anxiety over going out to eat
- Turning down last minute plans involving food because you didn't "account for it"
- Constant need for perfection
- Eating foods that are highly processed and with low nutrient value just because they "fit your macros"
- Eating a ton of low calorie diet foods that cause digestive issues and contain a ton of additive sugars

Even if you are in a routine 90% of the time, there's still days when you're going to go out to eat or get last minute drinks with friends. Macro tracking is a TOOL and not an end all be all. While it's important to hit your numbers to see progress over a shorter period of time, it's also important to check in with yourself mentally. This is a lifestyle meaning you have FOREVER to hit your macros and make progress. Slow and steady.

Giving yourself macro ranges, protein and overall calorie goals, or free meals and intuitive eating days will help a lot physiologically. When it comes to the last two points mentioned above that deal with eating highly processed foods and diet foods – everything in moderation. Get adequate micronutrient and whole protein sources first, then worry about that fun stuff. The rest of this guide deals with some in depth concepts and tactics when tracking, but my goal is to first promote the overall benefit of tracking: to learn how to properly fuel your body. If you first get down consistency and comfortability with tracking and want to get more spot on with it, THEN you can start to implement more of the tips and tricks. Big picture first! Then worry about the small stuff.

Different Applications for Tracking Macros

The top two macro tracking applications I know of are MyMacros+ and MyFitnessPal. For the sake of consistency I will be referencing MyFitnessPal for the entirety of this guide, but feel free to seek out which apps work best for you. I will also only be looking at the free version of MyFitnesspal because we balling on a budget folks.

Intro to MyFitnessPal

Opening the App: ●

When you open MyFitnessPal and create a log in it will ask you for your goal macros. It will even try to assign you macros based on your height, weight, and goals. I HIGHLY suggest bypassing all of this and find your calories based on the method mentioned above. The app doesn't know much about your history with dieting, your activity levels, etc. so how the heck is it supposed to know how much you should eat? Usually they prescribe macros that are way too low from what I've seen.

On the bottom of the screen you have 4 main tabs: **Home, Diary, Progress, and more**. You'll spend most of your time on the Diary Page seen below:
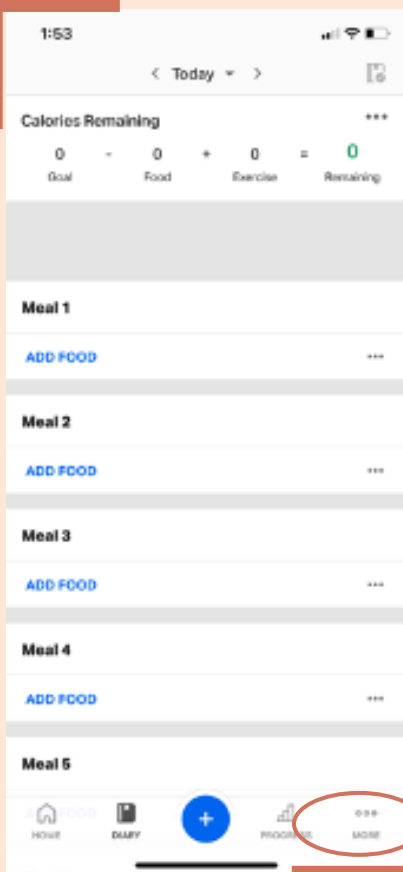
Setting your meals and goals:

You can change your meals from saying "breakfast" "lunch" and "dinner" to "meal 1, 2, 3" by going on your computer and changing diary settings. For whatever reason this can only be done on a desktop and not your phone.

Next (looking at the phone again) click on the **"more"** tab on the bottom right. Then click on **"goals"**.

With the free version, it only allows you to adjust your goals by %, not by grams. Due to this, I just suggest setting all goals to 0 then keeping track of how many calories you've eaten as you add food by looking at the totals.

How to add a Food: ●

For this demonstration I'll add 40 grams of Cinnamon Toast Crunch cereal.

Starting back on the **Diary page**, click **"add item"** under the meal you with to add it under.

Next, you can either search an item or scan a barcode. EVERY time you add an item that has a nutrition label, **double check the label with the item entered**. This will ensure accuracy and get rid of human error.

When I type in "cinnamon toast crunch" I get many results.
Notice – there's 3 that come up with green, verified check marks. However, the second one is in grams. I'm going to use the second one so I can adjust it based on how many grams I eat. Since 31 grams is the servings size, I'm going to set it to **"1 gram"** then type in **40 servings** to ensure 40 grams. I check the nutrition facts with the label and add it to my day.
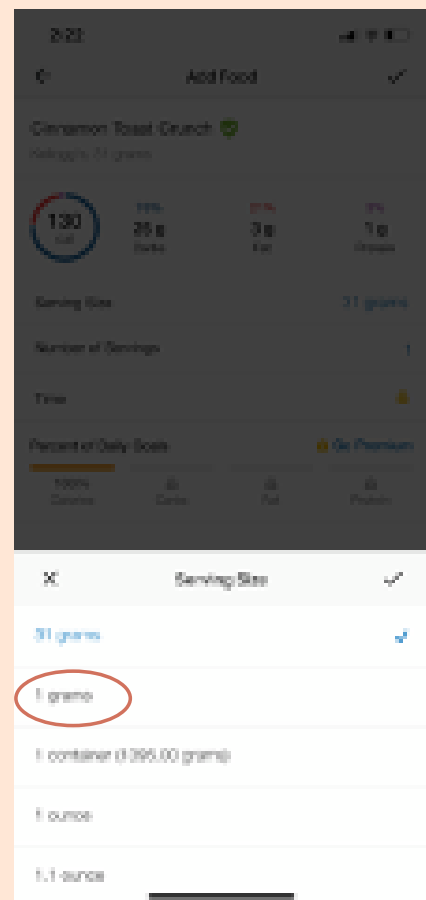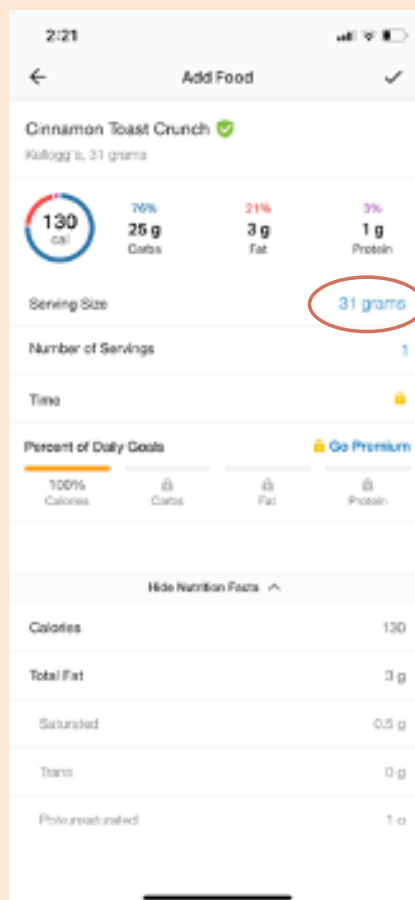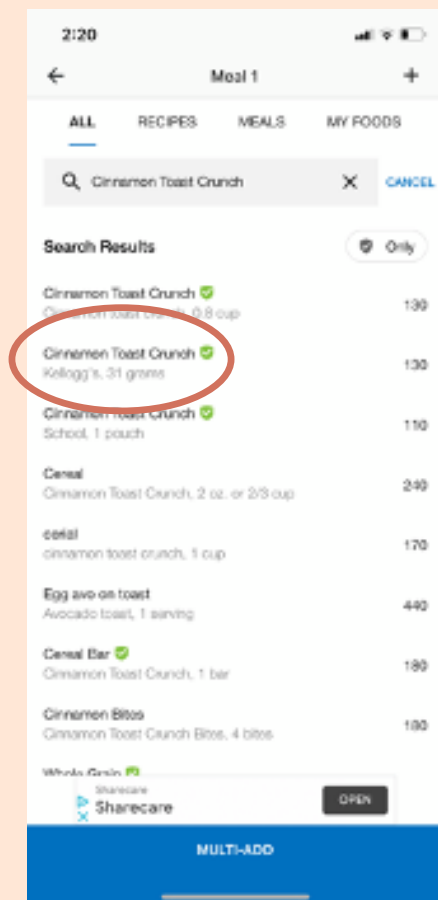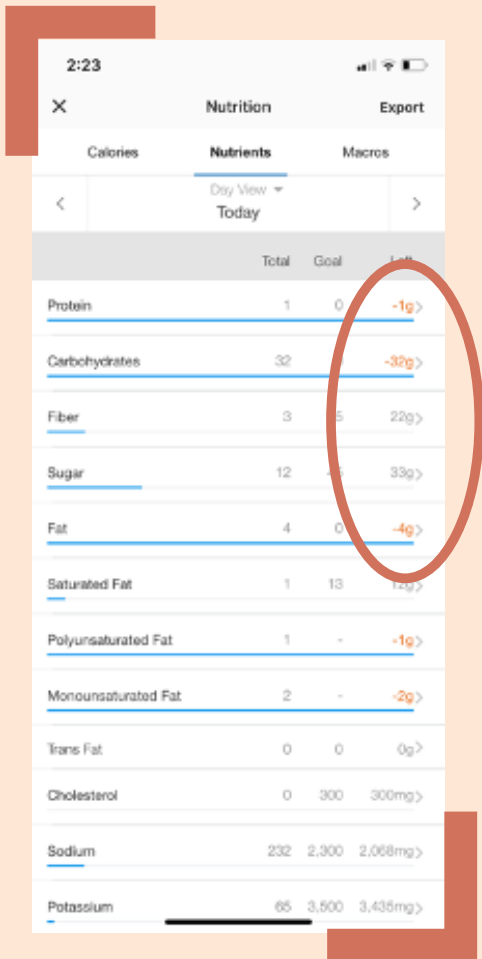
To see your macros for the day as you add in food: swipe down to the bottom of the diary page and click "nutrition." Due to the fact that you set your goals to 0, the numbers will show up as negative. However, the numbers on the right indicate how many fats, protein, and carbs you have eaten.

Looking Up Items without Labels

Another common question is how to look up food without labels, such as an apple or a sweet potato. I do encourage eating more whole foods instead of opting for packaged foods just because it's easier to track. An example when searching for an apple: Instead of just typing in "half an apple" or "small apple" get more accurate and type in "gala apple grams" or "gala apple USDA" then weigh it out accurately based on the amount you eat.
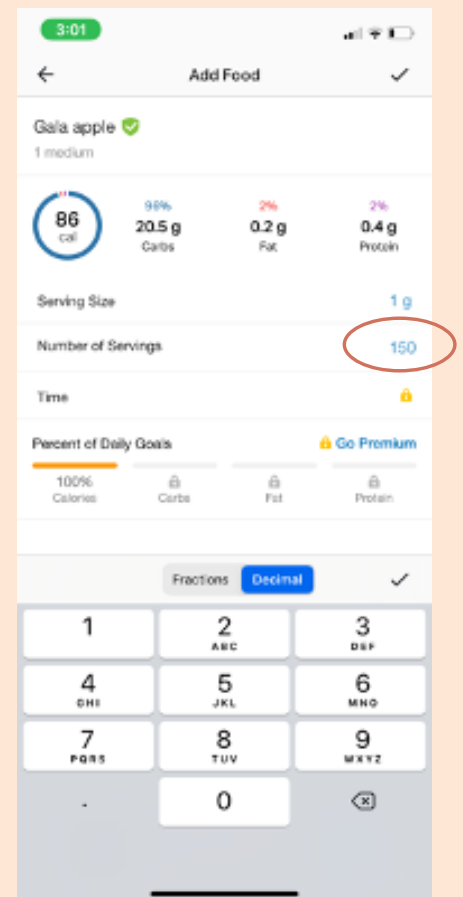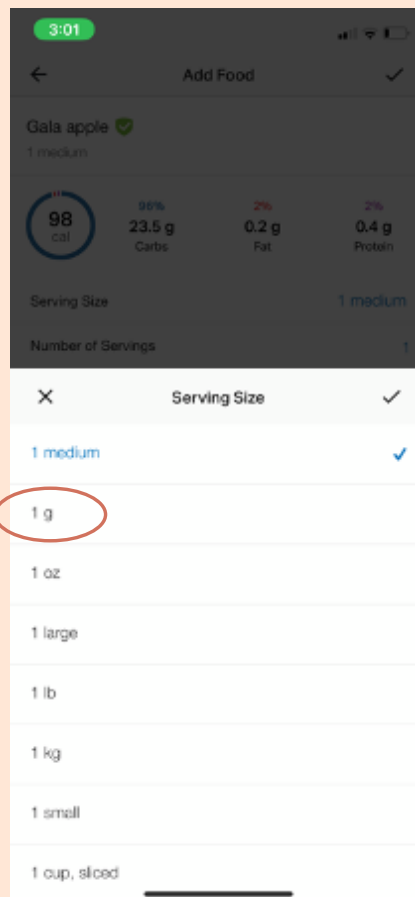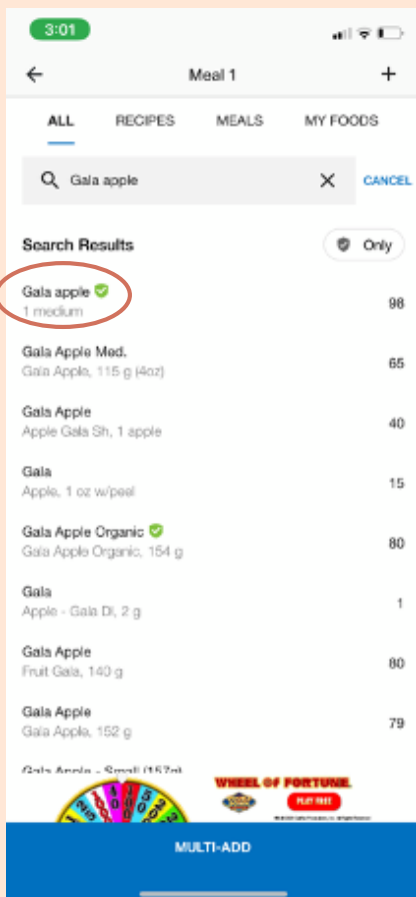
Weighing Your Food Accurately

Going back to the Cinnamon Toast Crunch example, once I type in 40 grams it's time to make sure I get the correct amount into my bowl. I suggest weighing out your food as opposed to using a measuring cup. It's a LOT easier to underestimate ingredients by packing them super tight into a measuring cup. Plus weighing things out = fewer dishes!

Food scales can be purchased for fairly cheap from Amazon, Walmart, Target, etc. No one brand is superior to the next, just make sure it has "grams" and "ounces" weight options, since those are used most commonly.

To weigh out your food start by putting your bowl on the scale and 0 it out. Then add 40 grams of your cinnamon toast crunch - BOOM.

Note: For sticky things like peanut butter it's easier to put the whole jar on the food scale, set the scale to 0, and then take out what you need. For example, if I were to want 16 grams of peanut butter, I would put the open jar on the scale, 0 it out, then take some of the PB out with a spoon until the scale reads "-16 grams". It will read as a negative number since I'm taking something out, but it works just the same. I find this to be a way less messy method!

Weighing Vegetables

A common question is "is it necessary to track and weigh out your vegetables?" In short - yes. If we are over here saying a calorie is a calorie, then all calories matter. Do I think you need to worry about being to the exact gram with your spinach leaves? No, but if you're eating loads of carrots or broccoli a day - that can still be over 100 calories and they count! Just always keep in mind that consistency is king.

Raw vs. Cooked Items

Another challenging aspect of tracking is deciding whether to weigh and track things raw or cooked. This usually applies to things like meats, noodles, and rice. When you look at a nutrition label for these items, it's written in terms of raw quantity. If you are just making one serving of noodles or rice, then yes it's easy to weigh things out raw. However, if you're bulk prepping chicken or spaghetti for the next few days, it doesn't make sense nor is it efficient to weigh things raw.

If you're going to weigh things cooked, just be consistent with your method! Usually for meats a serving of 4oz raw = 3oz cooked. So if I were to scan in 4oz raw into MyFitnessPal, I would weigh out 3oz cooked and call it a day. It's not an exact science but again, but that's all we can do sometimes. For noodles and rice, type in the search bar **"spaghetti noodles – cooked"** for example. The trick is consistency!

Restaurants

The next component we need to tackle is going out to eat. It's common that these days restaurants have nutrition labels on their website. (Some of the common chain restaurants are in the next section.) But what happens if you're eating at a restaurant that doesn't have the nutrition facts handy? **There's 2 main methods:** One option is tracking ingredient by ingredient. The second option is tracking a similar item from a different restaurant. To show an example, I'm going to track: 3 chicken street tacos with cheese, and salsa.

Note how these aren't exactly the same because there is no "exact" amount. When you're estimating that's all you can do sometimes is get a ballpark!

Meal 1	Calories kcal	Carbs g	Fat g	Protein g	Sodium mg	Sugar g
Corn tortillas - Tortillas, 3 tortillas	150	30	2	3	15	3
Chipotle - Chipotle - Chicken, 4 oz	180	0	7	32	310	0
Mexican Cheese - Cheese, 0.33 cup	110	1	9	6	180	0
Penny's salsa - Salsa, 4 tbs	20	3	0	2	80	2
Add Food │ Quick Tools	**460**	**34**	**18**	**43**	**585**	**5**

	Calories	Carbs	Fat	Protein	Sodium	Sugar
Joey Restaurant - Chicken Tacos, 3 Tacos	530	29	33	31	1,700	0
Add Food │ Quick Tools	**530**	**29**	**33**	**31**	**1,700**	**0**

Restaurant Chain Options

Chick-fil-A

Grilled chicken nugget 8 count:

140 calories 25p/2c/3.5f

Grilled chicken sandwich:

310 calories 29p/36c/6f

Starbucks Coffee

Egg white feta wrap:

290 calories 19p/33c/10f

Reduced fat turkey bacon sandwich:

230 calories 16p/28c/6f

Egg white red pepper bites:

170 calories 13p/13c/7f

In-N-Out Burger

Bun:

150 calories 3p/28c/2f

Patty:

100 calories 10p/0c/6f

Cheese:

90 calories 6p/0c/8f

Fries:

395 calories 7p/54c/18f

Spread:

80 calories: 0p/0c/9f

Chipotle Mexican Grill

**Chipotle actually has a nutrition calculator on their website

Chicken:

180 calories 32p/0c/7f

Black beans:

130 calories 8p/22c/1.5f

White cilantro rice:

185 calories 3.5p/35c/4f

McDonald's

Grilled chicken sandwich:

360 calories 31p/65c/4.5f

Small ice cream cone:

170 calories 5p/27c/4.5f

Plain hamburger:

240 calories 12p/28c/9f

Other restaurants that supply nutritional information online:

- Chilis
- Applebees
- Pita Jungle
- Pei Wei
- Panera
- Subway
- Taco bell
- Denny's
- Wendy's
- IHOP
- Olive Garden
- Dunkin Donuts
- And many others

Creating a Food

Creating a food is a good option if you can't find an item with the correct nutritional value labeled:

Start on the **"diary"** page
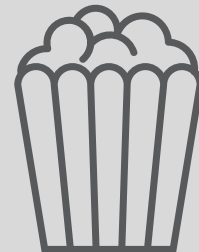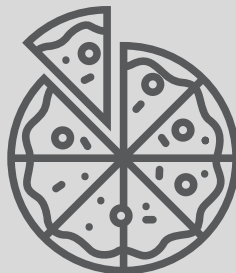Click **"Add food"** under the meal you wish
Click the **+** in the top right corner.
Click **"Create a food"**
Now you can enter the **Name, description, serving size, and macronutrients**.
I would at least enter the protein, carbs, fat, and fiber. Everything else is up to you dependent upon what you care to see.

Now you've created a food and it will pop up every time you use it!

Creating a recipe

Click **"add food"** under the meal you want
Click the top right **+** mark
Click **"create a recipe"**
Click **"enter ingredients manually"**
Create a title and the amount of servings in 1 recipe.
Then simply add each ingredient as you make it! You don't have to worry about fractioning out the portion you eat, because the app will do it for you.
For example, if you create a lasagna and there's 9 servings, you can just enter all the ingredients as you make it then click **"1/9 serving"**.
Then tomorrow if you have another 1/9th, the data will be saved.
**When creating recipes, don't forget important ingredients like oil and butter!

Alcohol

If you choose to partake in drinking, there is a way to drink smart and even track what you drink if you choose to do so.

For reference, **1 shot of hard alcohol** is around 100 calories.

To make things easy, I usually say to either take those calories from carbs or fats (or a mixture of both).

For instance, if I take a 100 calorie shot (1.5oz) and I want to count it towards my carbs for the day, I can **divide by 4 to get 25g of carbs.**

Similarly, if I want to utilize it for fats, I can **divide by 9 and get ~11g of fat**. MyFitnessPal may have options come up if you search "1 shot of tequila," but make sure to double check the grams of carbs or fats allotted for in the entry. If you don't see one that matches the nutritional value correctly, enter the alcohol in as a new food item.

Macro Friendly Meal Options

Wine = 125 calories per 5 oz
Vodka diet soda = 100 calories per drink
Vodka soda = 100 calories per shot
White claws = 100 calories per drink

**Note, even though seltzer cans only say 2 carbs, this does not take into account the calories from alcohol. Since alcohol isn't technically a carb or fat even though it has calories (weird I know,) they aren't required to account for those calories on the label. White Claws/Trulys are no exception to the rule and you should still divide the entire 100 calories by either 4 or 9 to take away from carbs or fats, respectively.

Common Mistakes

I understand MyFitnessPal and all these tips can be overwhelming. There's definitely a learning curve when it comes to learning the app and you'll eventually get better and more precise with time! Plus, the more you use it the easier it becomes to find items again. That being said, there are some common mistakes I would like to revisit when people start tracking their macros. **Here are some:**

Not Checking Entered Items with the Label

MyFitnessPal is user created, meaning people enter in most of the data if the check mark isn't there to verify certain food. If this is the case, double check the item being entered with the nutrition label you have on a packaged item. If the amount entered was off due to human error, create a new food in the app and enter the correct nutrition.
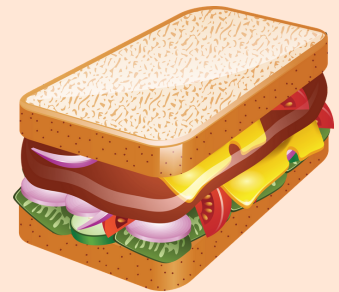
Not Weighing out Food

I already mentioned this one above, but typing in "gala apple" then weighing it in grams is a lot more accurate than just entering in "medium apple." Same goes for measuring cups – weighing your food out is a lot more accurate.

Estimating Too Often

I encourage going out to eat and socializing. However, if you aren't seeing progress it can be frustrating. Take a look at how many times per week you spend actually weighing and tracking your food vs. estimating.

Not Tracking Bites of Things

Small bites can add up. A seemingly small item like a donut hole or a bite of a cookie can wrack up 80-100 calories quite quickly. Account for these things!

FDA and Nutrition Labels

You might notice that after tracking for a few days to the gram you notice your overall calories reported in MyFitnessPal day to day are vastly different. Why is that?

Well the FDA (the people who approve the food nutrition labels) allow companies to round the stated caloric content up or down by 5%. 5% doesn't seem like too much, but over the course of several foods this can definitely add up. This is just another reason to hone in on macro targets vs. just overall calorie goals! It's more accurate.

Concluding Thoughts

Tracking macros is a skill that is learned and improved upon over time. For many people, tracking macros can be a stepping stone into learning what's in foods, how to fuel their bodies correctly, and what portion sizes look like.

However, I do want to point out that I don't believe tracking macros is forever. It's easier than we think to become obsessed over every gram of food and anxious over not having control. After tracking for years I finally pulled the plug on tracking when I noticed that I wasn't trusting myself and my hunger cues without the reliance of the app. Macro tracking served it's purpose in my life - but I realized I got the most out of it that I could! After that point I was just using tracking as a crutch.

I encourage you all to educate yourselves with the use of tracking, but not become consumed with it. Realize when you've gotten what you need out of the process and reintroduce intuitive eating back into your life. You will still have the habits you've created from diligently tracking.

Macro Cheat Sheet

Protein

Chicken Breast

Turkey

Tuna

Lean fish

Protein powder

Egg Whites

Carbs

Rice

Bread

Jam

Vegetables

Potatoes

Sour candy

Cereal

Fruit

Oatmeal

Skim Milk
Fat free Dairy
Whipped Cream
Beans
Beef Jerky
Quinoa
Pasta

Protein Bars
Pizza
Restaurant Salads
Sandwiches
Nuts, seeds, nut butters

Whole Eggs
Bone-in meat
Ground beef
Steak
Pork chops
Bacon
Salmon
Cheese

Ice Cream
Avocado
Chocolate
Baked goods
Yummy stuff

Fats

Butter

Olive Oil

Any Oil