

# Is A Balanced Contest Prep Possible?

Today's topic is going to require a little bit of food for thought. I want to talk about what constitutes a smart and healthy balanced contest prep.

One of the things that I think a lot of competitors get confused about is that they equate the sport of bodybuilding to being something that's relatively healthy. And it's easy to see why, since the way that we all get ready for shows is through diet and exercise - two things which are seen as being good for the body, and about improving your life.

Here's the thing that makes the sport unhealthy on the physiological level..

While training in a way to feel good about yourself and to look good is, of course, a very good thing to do, achieving the level of leanness that we need to see for the stage is not. The human body does not like to carry an excessive amount of muscle naturally, nor does it like to be extremely lean either - particularly for women.

Realize that in your attempt to prepare for your next show, you are having to fight against millions of years of human evolution. And although contest preparation is not rocket science, for the majority of people it takes a lot of hard work, sacrifice, and grit to be able to do it successfully.

Bodybuilding as a sport, in and of itself, is an extreme - but does that mean that you have to be extreme in your methods of preparation?

In more recent time, you hear a lot of chatter on social media and on blogs about having a balanced contest prep, but is that realistic for the majority of people? And what does balance mean in this respect?

These are the things that I want to explore in today's post.

**Taking a Sports Specific Approach Can Improve Your Results - Positively**

There have been a few studies that have come out over the last few years that explore how more “scientific” type of approach has proven quite effective. For instance, in a recent study a group of researchers followed a 21 year old natural male bodybuilder over a 14 week prep. His content prep program was set up as followed:

Over a 14-week period, the Athlete was provided with a scientifically designed nutrition and conditioning plan that encouraged him to (i) consume a variety of foods; (ii) not neglect any macronutrient groups; (iii) exercise regularly but not excessively and; (iv) incorporate rest days into his conditioning regime.

The idea of his program set up was about not going to extremes, instead the goal was to stick to the books of what a “sane” approach would be.

So no excessive cardio, no overtraining, allowing for recovery, keep variety in his plan, and don't cut out any macro group completely. [Click here](#) for a closer look at his actual diet - Weeks 1 to 5.

During his prep, he trained ONLY 4 DAYS A WEEK, and performed a mix of steady state cardio and HIIT training - in a fasted state. Now, the researchers pointed out in the study that they didn't so much feel it was effective or would make much of a difference (I've written about that here), it was given to him at his request and preference.

Well, from this he saw a drop in fat with a little bit of lean muscle loss (expected on ANY plan in the absence of anabolics), his RMR decreased (again expected with the loss in body mass), however his body's ability to burn fat as fuel during rest increased, and it increased doubly when training.

Now here's the interesting thing when it comes to this study, during the contest prep, the athlete did not have severe swings of mood and hunger. He actually felt pretty ok on it, and the researchers concluded that this is due to a non-extreme approach to the training and diet set up.

Over the 14-week period of study, the Athlete reported no severe feelings of hunger or thirst. Previous work suggests that rigid dietary regimes, as opposed to ones that are more flexible, are associated with a higher prevalence of overeating and bingeing [54],[55], however the Athlete in this study reported no such desires.

The study concludes that one can indeed implement a scientifically support and well designed contest prep program and see fantastic results. So when it comes to what YOU'RE now doing in the gym, it's time you take a step back and evaluate if it's necessary to go too far with extremes.

From eating no carbs, no fats, no fruits, no dairy, only lean meats like chicken and white fish, or performing hours of cardio, and training 7 days a week, you need to realize that all of that is not necessary. You'll be better off giving yourself some more time to allow for a responsible contest prep to take place.

## **The Balanced Contest Prep... What Does That Mean Exactly?**

I asked this question on my Facebook and got some interesting responses. You hear about people talk about a "balanced" contest prep, but no one really has clearly defined what that means. And what my friends on Facebook pointed out, it's really different for everyone.

Balance in your diet can mean for some having the ability to sub foods out whenever they wish, for others that may mean simply following a meal plan that doesn't include the same 4 foods for every meal, for others it may be the ability to use macros and choose foods they wish within the numbers given to them.

Balance in training for many might mean not spending hours upon hours in the gym, allowing for personal life, or just simply some down time. It might mean not doing hours of cardio a day, and being able to simply be in and out of the gym in a matter of 2 hours or less.

So to find balance, YOU need to define what that means to you. And then work your best to maintain that during your contest prep. And that's not to say that it will be smooth sailing, however doing what you can and putting your all into your work, all while still having some semblance of a normal life - that is the puzzle you need to put together and keep intact.

## **Keep Your Mindset Positive and Remember to Have FUN!**

What sparked your interest in wanting to compete? Remember before starting, and maybe even in the very beginning if you are a little more seasoned, it looked like fun.

It was something that you know you could do and excel at, enjoy, and feel empowered by. For many

competitors, it starts out that way. But then shortly after what starts to happen is that they lose sight of what got them into the game in the first place.

Now suddenly, they are filled with anxiety about their upcoming show date, they are overrun by doing too much in the gym and following a poorly set up diet. Now, it's no longer fun, and often, they may want to quit. Well, it doesn't have to be like that. It doesn't have to be something that drives you completely insane and stress you out.

Mindset is everything, and a part of a balanced approach as is your diet and training. How you think during the entire process can indeed influence your end result even on a physiological level. With the increase in stress comes an increase in cortisol, once that's up and elevated over a period of time, your adrenals begin to burn out - and then come a host of other health issues that can and will grind all fat loss to a screeching halt.

How you think in this process is crucial. So making the CHOICE to be positive, to enjoy the process even when it feels almost impossible. To stay focused on your goal and always keep in mind that this is one of the most challenging things you can do on both a physical and mental level. In the long run, when it's time to finally step on that stage, you'll be able to do so in a way that makes you proud - and hasn't driven you completely insane.

***So that's it! So tips on how to make this very extreme sport balance and empowering to follow. What are your thoughts? How do you find balance at the end of the day, and as the weeks go by? Share with us in the comments.***

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Sources A nutrition and conditioning intervention for natural bodybuilding contest preparation: case study Scott Lloyd Robinson, Anneliese Lambeth-Mansell, Gavin Gillibrand, Abbie Smith-Ryan and Laurent Bannock