

# The Basics of Setting Up Your Diet - Part 3: Determining Proper Calories

Ok so, I need to admit something. In my enthusiasm to dig into this series I realized I went a bit out of order - so now we need to back track just a little bit when it comes to this article.

So far we've discussed macros to a great degree, and I think you should have a good understanding about how to set that up. But before you can determine your daily macros, you have to know what your daily calories should be sitting at, and that's what we'll touch on for today!

Now, just as our last article in the series, I'm going to touch upon the fantastic Metabolic Rate, Daily Calories, and Macro calculator we have on the site for our **Inner Circle members**.

The image shows a screenshot of a website with a calculator and a goal selection interface. The calculator is titled "Calculate Your BMR and TDEE" and includes fields for Gender (Male/Female), Age (Years), Height (Ft/In), and Weight (lbs). It also has radio buttons for Imperial and Metric units. Below these are options for Formula (BMR (Mifflin St. Jeor Formula) and Lean Mass Equation (To Factor In Body Fat Percentage)) and Times Per Week You Train (3 times/week). A "Calculate Your TDEE" button is present. Below the calculator is a section titled "Choose Your Goals and Dietary Intensity" with four goal categories: Fat Loss, Maintain, Lean Mass Build, and Custom. Each category has a "CALORIES/DAY" input field and radio button options for deficit or surplus levels (e.g., 10% - Small Deficit, 5% - Small Surplus). To the right of the calculator is a sidebar with a promotional message: "Get FREE Tips and Advice Sent Right To You Via Email" and a "Join Our EXCLUSIVE Email Group" button. Below this is a form to "ENTER YOUR INFORMATION BELOW" with fields for First Name, Last Name, and Email address, and a "Sign up" button. A chat window is also visible in the bottom right corner.

## Food Calculators

It should be noted, however, that the information in this article can be used by anyone, you simply will have to do the math on your own - but it's fairly simple math! Enough of this small talk, let's dig right in!

## **The Caloric Math Equation - What To Use?**

There are so many ways you can come to the same conclusion regarding calories. The number on thing I say to just about everyone on this topic is to keep in mind that these are just ESTIMATES. They aren't absolutes. So one method may give you one outcome and amount of calories, while another method may give you a completely different answer. You have to find what works best for YOU and simply adjust accordingly.

When I am developing plans for clients, the first step for me is always factoring in things such as age, gender, height, weight, lifestyle and goals. From there I get a number, and determine where we will go with the diet. But after these calories, and the overall diet is set, it's a matter of trying things out on them, seeing what works, and adjusting based on biofeedback.

And that's exactly the approach and thought process you should proceed with, and continue to use as well. When it comes to equations, I personally like to get VERY specific for my client programming. I feel as a coach, using simple equations a client can easily use on their own is kind of a disservice. It's my duty to mull over the difficult stuff, the specific stuff, so their journey can be a tad bit easier. And for that reason, I prefer to use the Mifflin-St. Jeor Equation, and it's the basis upon which our food calculator is built.

### **A Closer Look at Mifflin-St. Jeor**

The Mifflin-St. Jeor Equation was developed in 1990, and has been found to be the most reliable measure of predicting basal metabolic rate (BMR) according to a 2005 study. To lay out the math, here's the the exact breakdown of the Mifflin-St. Jeor:

***Note: weight in kilograms, the height in centimeters, and the age in years.***

$$\text{Male: BMR} = 10 \times \text{weight} + 6.25 \times \text{height} - 5 \times \text{age} + 5 \quad \text{Female: BMR} = 10 \times \text{weight} + 6.25 \times \text{height} - 5 \times \text{age} - 161$$

These equations will give you just your daily needs for basic function - to essentially just be alive. So breathing, blinking your eyes, metabolic functions of the body usually not within your control. To find your daily caloric needs, you will need to go a step further and use specific factors based on lifestyle and activity. Here's how that breaks down.

- 1.200 = sedentary (little or no exercise)
- 1.375 = lightly active (light exercise/sports 1-3 days/week)
- 1.550 = moderately active (moderate exercise/sports 3-5 days/week)
- 1.725 = very active (hard exercise/sports 6-7 days a week)
- 1.900 = extra active (very hard exercise/sports and physical job)

So let's take the following case and figure out her daily caloric needs:

Mary is 35 years old, she's 5'6 inches tall, and she weighs 145 pounds. She hits the gym 5 days a week, doing cardio and weights, and going pretty hardcore beast mode during her workouts. She has a regular desk job, nothing special, but her overall goal is fat loss.

Using the Mifflin-St. Jeor, step 1 of determining her BMR calories looks like this:

$$\text{Female: } BMR = 10 \times \text{weight (kg)} + 6.25 \times \text{height (cm)} - 5 \times \text{age} - 161$$

$$\text{Female: } BMR = 10 \times 65.77 + 6.25 \times 152.4 - 5 \times 35 - 161$$

**BMR = 1371** (This is for simple daily metabolic function.)

**Daily total caloric needs:**

1.550 = moderately active (moderate exercise/sports 3-5 days/week)

$$1371 \times 1.550 = 2125 \text{ Calories Per Day.}$$

Now, our fantastic calculator does ALL of the math for our members. And it came to the same conclusions as above as far as the predicted calories. For our members, I used the second available choice for \*Intense Training 5x/Week as opposed to the normal choice of 5x/Week of Sports or

Exercise.

The Intense factor choice will set calories a little higher, and falls in line with where many of you are that follow a traditional 5 day split, and it's in line with the original formula equations for the Mifflin-St.Jeor. (LOL, for those of you who haven't used our calculator, that last passage was like Greek to you, but for our members, they know what I mean).

## **The SIMPLE Mathematics Equation for Determining Calories**

I know some of you are looking at this post with a MAJOR side eye, and not wanting to do all of that work. And that's totally understandable. I know there are some of you who are really into the numbers and getting VERY specific, so that's more for you.

For those who would like a more simple method, I do have some great news for you! There are a few tried and true numbers you can use to determine daily calories that come within the same estimates as the Mifflin-St.Jeor. To determine your daily calories you can use one of the following as your baseline.

### **Basic Equation For BMR**

10 X BW in Pounds You can take this equation to find your daily basal metabolic rate. And from there, you can get more specific and use any of the factors above, based on activity, that will help you to figure out your specific daily caloric needs. It may be a little higher in numbers than the more specific equation, but you'll see it's roughly in the same ball park. So let's take a look at Mary again.

Mary weighs 145 Pounds

$$10 \times 145 = \mathbf{1450 \text{ Calories as her BMR}}$$

Mary trains 5 days a week, so we'll use the factor of 1.550 again.

$$1450 \times 1.550 = \mathbf{2248 \text{ Calories Per Day}}$$

So as you can see, the numbers aren't too far off from each other. The Mifflin-St. Jeor has her at 2125 Calories Per Day, while the basic equation w/ the same factors has her at 2248 Calories Per Day. It's about a 123 calorie difference.

Something that won't break the bank, and can easily be adjusted for with tweaking. Remember, you will always have to find the number, apply the number, and then adjust the number only after putting it to work, and seeing how your body responds. Biofeedback is the most important factor in ALL of this.

## **Determining Calories for Fat Loss or Lean Building**

The above equations are to simply figure out how many calories you should be eating per day to simply MAINTAIN your weight while living your lifestyle. Now if your is fat loss or lean building, we would need to do a little more math to adjust things accordingly. Let's go ahead and break that down.

**Caloric Deficits and Fat Loss** The NUMBER ONE mantra I want you to repeat when it comes to calories and fat loss is this:

***In order to reach your body transformation goals...***

***You must EAT to be lean, EAT to grow, EAT to be strong, and EAT to reach your goals. Food is your greatest ally - NOT your worst enemy.***

I can't stress this enough, especially for all of my women out there. Just because fat loss is your goal, it doesn't mean you need to take a nose dive with calories and cut everything under the sun out of your diet. It's important that you realize that in order to see your goals become your reality, that you must EAT. You must feed it.

In general, I like to take the approach of only cutting as many calories as need be in order to see a client's body respond. I want to continue to feed them, and keep a high intensity in the gym, letting that aid in leading to further fat loss. So, what I like to go by is more or less percentages for fat loss. There are usually 3 levels that I'll look at for a client:

**10% Deficit:** enough to lower calories a tiny bit, good for those looking for more of a recompositioning goal, and my already be at a starting point where they are fairly lean, and just

need a little tweaking to get to the end result.

**15% Deficit:** obviously a bigger cut in calories, and more in line with those with a pretty healthy metabolism. They may have a little more to lose than someone who is already fairly lean or smaller framed, and they're looking to push fat loss as their goal more so than simply recompositioning.

**20% Deficit:** a more aggressive set up that will bring calories down considerably. It's not terribly low in that it gets in the way of bodily function, or contributes to an unhealthy lifestyle. But it is low enough to really move things for most people, and for those who may have a lot more to lose, it a good starting point.

Taking a look once again at Mary, whose goal is fat loss, let's have her at a 15% deficit. So her total daily calories for fat loss looks like the following:

**2125 Calorie Per Day (from our Mifflin-St.Jeor Equation above) - 15% = 1806 Calories per day for fat loss.**

This leaves her with approximately a 319 calorie deficit from her diet. In general, the agreed upon caloric deficit that stays within sane levels for most people is about 250-500 calories from maintenance. So as you can see, we fall right in the middle of that. If Mary wanted to increase her total daily caloric deficit to 500 calories per day, she can get the rest of it from her training. In essence, she can focus on burning approximately 181 calories from training (she'll likely burn far more than that).

What's great about her caloric levels at 15% is that she's still able to eat enough food and not starving herself. At 1806 calories per day, she's still above her predicted BMR (1371 or 1450 depending on the equation you use), so she isn't at a point of starving herself - however she is definitely eating in a deficit which will lead to fat loss.

## **Caloric Surplus and Lean Building**

This is the part that gets a little fun because you get to eat MORE! For many of you, the biggest concern and goal is how do you put on lean muscle without putting on too much fat. It is very possible, and all in how you set up your diet. It should be noted that no matter what, YOU WILL put on some body fat in the process of building, even for a lean build (or lean bulk as some call it). That's just the process of what happens to the body on a physiological level, you can control it to some degree. For our lean building diets, what I like to do is use the following percentages for increasing calories:

**5% Surplus:** This is a great starting point for easing into a lean building plan. It provides you with just enough calories to get the ball rolling, and for putting on a little size without piling on the body fat. Now, you may notice your build coming at a slower pace than if you were eating a bit more, but for those of you more interested in growing slowly (while maintaining leanness) this is a good starting point for you.

**10% Surplus:** For those that really want to do some damage in the gym, and put growth on high gear, this is probably my favorite starting point. You'll be able to eat more, but the fat loss won't pile on to a huge degree - particularly if you are putting those calories to good use in the gym.

**15% Surplus:** For this level, calories are set a bit more aggressively higher. This percentage level I like to leave for those who have a pretty high metabolism, or those who are more ectomorphic in frame, and simply blow through every calorie they eat.

Putting on size is hard for you guys in this category, so getting all the calories in that you can is dually important. For those who may be training super hard in the gym, and let's say you also participate in a sport on top of all of that (maybe you do Crossfit, or play soccer, you run etc), then if lean building is your goal, the extra calories lost from training need to be accounted for. So this would be a good starting point for you, and you may even be able to go a little higher hitting closer to 20% if you find you're not progressing in size the way you wish to be.

Now once again, our nifty calculator does all of this math for our members, and it definitely makes the process so much easier. And as I have said, I prefer these more precise methods of factoring in calories than simple general equation simply because you get to truly personalize what YOUR body needs, and can tweak things accordingly. But all and all, as I have mentioned already in this article, any equation you use is only an estimate.

The real test is in putting it into action, and then seeing how the body responds. You can and should be tweaking things constantly and doing it because the body dictates it. Always look to biofeedback. In our next article, we'll take a look at when and why you should considering tweaking your plan, whether that means taking calories up or down, or adjusting macros.

**Got questions or comments, want to add to the discussion? Then go ahead and post below in our comments box!**

