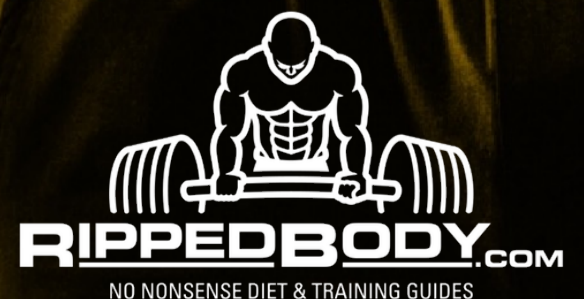


THE DIET ADJUSTMENTS MANUAL

FORMERLY CALLED, *'THE LAST SHRED'*

by **ANDY MORGAN**

THIRD EDITION



This book is not intended for the treatment or prevention of disease, nor as a substitute for medical treatment, nor as an alternative to medical advice. Use of the guidelines herein is at the sole choice and risk of the reader.

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For information contact: andy@rippedbody.com

This book is also dedicated to my online coaching clients.

Your leap of faith in hiring me has changed my life forever. I live one filled with meaning, the most extraordinary set of friends, and work I love more and more each day.

Thank you. 🙏

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PREFACE



At the end of 2014, I announced that I was taking an indefinite break from coaching. I had been blogging and working online for three and a half years. I loved it, but I wanted to create space to improve the way I did things.

My knowledge had taken a giant leap forward in those first few years, and I felt embarrassed by some of my original, arrogantly-written articles. The industry friends made at conferences had become the most meaningful in my life, but I felt like an imposter and worried I'd be "found out" if I didn't rewrite them.

I also wanted to take time to consider how I could improve the way I coached. I had a good reputation and happy clients, but I felt a clean break was the only way to give me the space to develop a better service.

I put up a blog post announcing the break and started a waiting list for coaching, telling people I would contact them when I returned.

What I initially thought would be three months turned into twelve. I ran down my savings entirely, but it was the most transformative year of my career.

Six months into the break, May 2015, I was at a fitness conference in the US listening to a friend, Sol Orwell, talk about the importance of email newsletters. The gist was simple: email allows you to speak directly to your audience without being at the mercy of the Google search or social media algorithms.

Collect email addresses from readers, then deliver so much value that they fall in love with your content. Sales will follow.

I had nothing to sell, but I liked the idea a lot. I knew if I could get people to stick around that I'd have a shot at undoing the brainwashing the fitness industry had likely given them. And from personal experience, I knew they'd be grateful forever.

I had ~250,000 blog visits per month, but not a single email address. I decided to extend my break to work on it.

For my “ethical bribe” to get a reader’s email address, I turned some of my articles into a free ebook, *The RippedBody Nutrition Setup Guide*, and bundled it with an email course covering the most common mistakes people make with nutrition setup.

People were delighted; it built a sense of connection, I had a list of people excited to receive my emails, and I didn't have any algorithm coming between us.

At this point, ~500 people had put their names down on the waiting list for coaching (it was ~800 by the end of the year). I felt honored, but also exceptionally awkward; I couldn't say when I would return to coaching, and even when I did, I had no way of predicting when I would be available.

I wanted to offer them an alternative, and I did not like the idea of hiring junior coaches. So I started work on a new book explaining how I make decisions when I coach. It would bridge the gap between nutrition setup and the results my clients get.

Further, I'd seen how the best clients were (and still are) the ones most familiar with my writing. They know the way I think, have probably tried things and had a degree of success themselves, and generally don't have any of the wild expectations the industry typically sells them on. So I knew this would help ensure a good fit.

I called it *The Diet Adjustments Manual*, the first edition of the book you are reading now. It was the first time I had sold something other than coaching, and the reception was even better than I had hoped.

What happened next completely took me by surprise.

Eric Helms, someone I looked up to in the industry, asked if I would be interested in working with him and Andrea Valdez on creating two books based on his popular youtube "pyramid" videos. He said that I clearly knew about how to get these things done, and he needed help. Though I explained I only had a few months of experience doing this, he said he was impressed with the quality of what I did and wanted me on board. My savings were running low at this time, but I had a little income from the book sales and having the waiting list gave me a safety net. It was too good of an opportunity to miss, so I dove in.

In December of 2015, we released the first editions of The Muscle and Strength Pyramid books. It had now been a year since I started the break, I had done everything I wanted (and more!), so I started coaching again.

I switched from fixed, 12-week periods to offering ongoing coaching for as long as the client wanted. This gave me the chance to guide people through cutting, transition, and bulking phases, which was much more challenging and rewarding. There was less pressure on both sides, nothing felt rushed, and my learning accelerated.

In 2017, two years after the initial release of *The Diet Adjustments Manual*, I felt the need to write a second edition. I added flow charts, more detailed client examples and changed the title to *The Last Shred*. At that time, I considered it the best I could do, but looking back shows me just how much I have learned in the four years since that release.

The constant learning is what I love about this job. But it's a double-edged sword because I am continually looking back on my old work and feeling the need to update it.

I have known for a while now that I needed to write this third edition, but there was so much to add that I kept putting it off, telling myself I was busy with other projects. Though this is no doubt, the procrastination monkey in my head played a role, as I listed up all the things I have worked on since 2017, I guess is partially true.

We released the [second editions](#) of *The Muscle and Strength Pyramid* books in 2019, and I got the [physical editions](#) published on Amazon. I helped get [Spanish](#), [Italian](#), and [simplified Chinese](#) editions published. And at the time of writing, we're very close to having Japanese and traditional

Chinese editions completed also. My [Japanese site's team](#) translated the [3rd edition of Starting Strength](#) (2019), and we built a [46-video course](#) teaching the Squat, Bench Press, and Deadlift (2020), which I've [just released in English](#) (2021). Between these things, I also released the second and third editions of my “ethical bribe” ([the Nutrition Setup Guide](#)), with the latest coming out right around the time that the COVID-19 lockdowns started to happen globally in March 2020.

But, as rewarding as these projects were to work on, none of them are my baby, which is this book. And having completed everything I wanted, in the fall of 2020, I finally started work on this third edition.

ABOUT THE THIRD EDITION

I started this edition thinking I would update the writing and add a section on bulking. But as I began editing, I found that it constrained my thinking, so I decided to write without referencing the original to see what I would come up with.

The result is this complete rewrite. It is double the length, barely recognizable to readers of the first or second editions. I'm thrilled with how it has turned out, thanks in no small part to the readers and email subscribers who kindly gave suggestions on how to improve it.

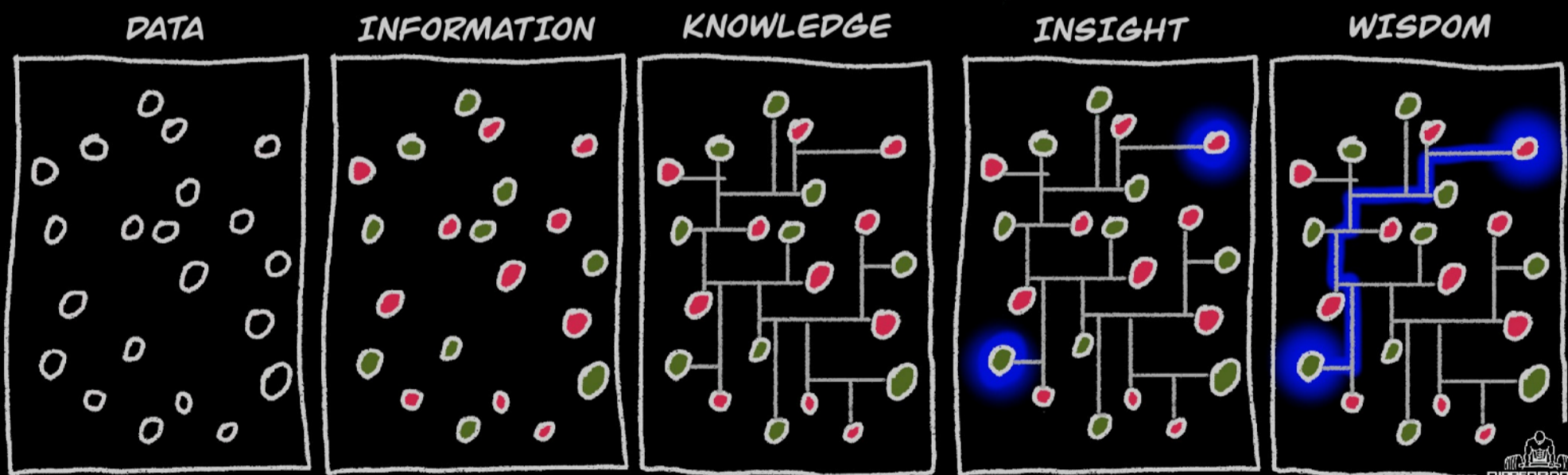
Everybody loves and benefits from examples, so I have increased the number considerably. When in doubt, I've erred

on the side of giving one. I took the same approach to visuals. Basically, I'd prefer risk over-explaining things, knowing that people can 'flip' the page, than under-explain and leave people lost.

After adding the much-requested section on adjustments for bulking, I tied the different phases together with detailed sections on transitioning to maintenance, cut, and bulk periods, which are critical to success. For this reason, I changed the name from *The Last Shred* back to *The Diet Adjustments Manual*, feeling the former no longer quite fit.

I decided to remove the bonus section at the end of the second edition, which contained mini-essays for industry friends about the lessons I had learned coaching online, how I structure it, and how I approach client intake and vetting. At the time, they felt too personal for the blog, and I feared public criticism. Now I care far less, so I'll rewrite and publish my latest thoughts on those topics on the site over the coming year.

INTRODUCTION



Physique change can be an exciting but frustrating business.

Almost all of us have a degree of initial success; this gets us hooked, but sooner or later, we get stuck.

Many of us spend years trying to get past this point, but the fitness industry is an unforgiving place when you don't know where to turn for advice.

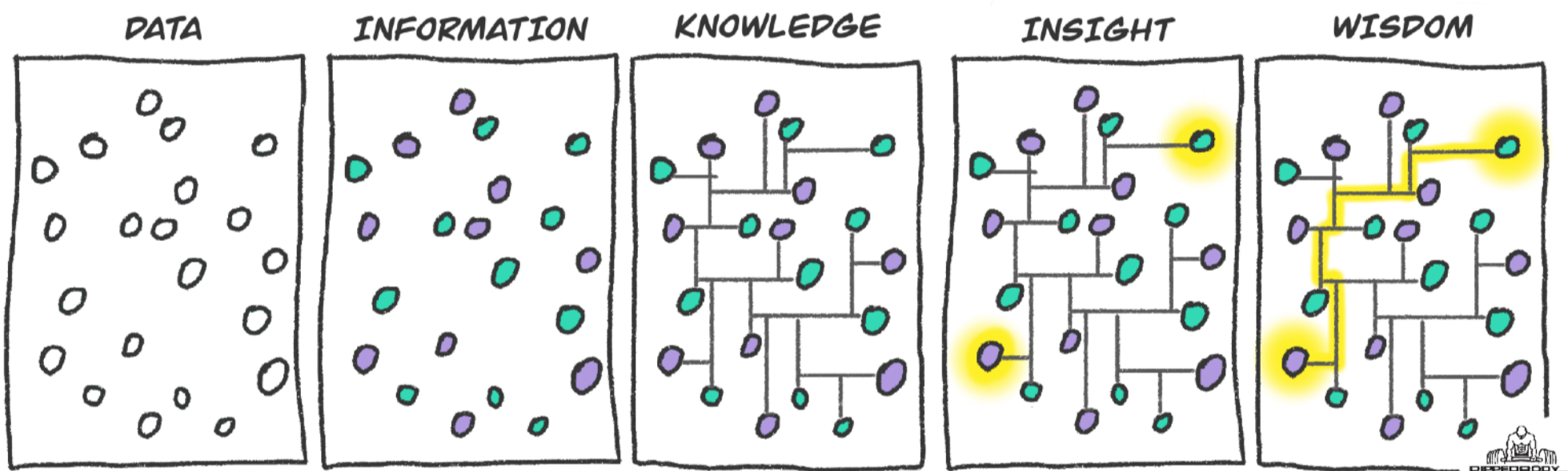
In the last decade, misinformation has multiplied, and extreme voices have gotten amplified.

Good information is more abundant, but it's harder to come by. It's labeled as "old-thinking" by the quacks, and nowhere near as appealing as the pseudoscientific shortcuts they offer up as "evidence-based" alternatives. We are bounced from fad to fad, and when we get nowhere, the echo-chamber leads to us being convinced that we are the ones with something wrong with us.

We are that kid in a schoolyard who has been passed around the bullies, robbed of our lunch money, bus pass, phone, and shoes. We are left standing in nothing but our socks and briefs, our confidence in tatters, tears running down our cheeks, believing, "I have shit genetics, this fitness game really isn't for me."

I've been there, I know exactly how this feels, and I've dedicated my career to coaching those who were close to giving up altogether.

This book, and my coaching, are the opposite of cutting-edge. The fundamentals of physique change are well established but not sexy. Diligent tracking, patience, and systematic adjustments based on data are not sexy. — To anyone who has not failed before, these things won't seem worthwhile. But people come around to the idea once they are frustrated enough and have realized that the seemingly longer path to their desired physique is the shorter one.



This book shows you the system I use to get results for my coaching clients. You will learn how to execute your first cut to shreds, successfully bulk without getting unnecessarily fat, and learn how to alternate these phases to keep improving over time.

There may be some rather painful “*aha*” moments as you identify the mistakes you have made in the past, but you can

take comfort in the fact that you aren't alone, and you will know what to do this time around.

Before I introduce the content, I need to be clear about what this book is *not*.

This is a book about diet adjustments, *not* diet setup. If you wish to learn how to calculate your calorie and macro targets, how many meals you should eat and when, whether you should consider macro cycling, refeeds, diet breaks, or intermittent fasting, and why I consider the majority of supplements to be a waste of your time, then see either my free [Nutrition Setup Guide](#), or [The Muscle and Strength Pyramid: Nutrition](#), which I co-authored with Eric Helms and Andrea Valdez.

This book takes over from there.

I have started with a chapter outlining the most common reasons why people fail. Nutrition is only one aspect of this, and there is no point in you going down the rabbit hole with me in diet adjustments if the answer to your problem is something simple like “*sleep more*” or “*train harder!*” I have linked to resources covering the topics not addressed in this book. The majority are free ones that my colleagues or I have created.

From there, I have three chapters dedicated to helping you decide a direction. The first covers my thoughts on when to bulk, cut, or chase a recomp. This requires an estimation of your body fat percentage, so the next is filled with client photos to help you compare and estimate your own. The third of these

will help you determine the appropriate rate of weight gain or loss, for your situation. You may have read about these things when going through my nutrition setup guide before, but they are critical, so I make no apologies for including them here. Please don't gloss over them.

The next chapter explains how cut and bulk cycles look in terms of weight, fat, and muscle mass changes. Because if you know what to expect, you won't panic when your weight changes suddenly or get disappointed when you discover that these changes weren't fat (when cutting) or muscle mass (when bulking).

I then move into a chapter on why adjustments are needed, crushing the common misconception that we can make calculations and then forget about them until we achieve the desired state. The only way to cut without needing to adjust is by setting your calorie intake too low, risking muscle loss. The only way to bulk without needing to adjust is to set your calorie intake too high, causing unnecessary fat gain.

The following two chapters cover why fluctuations in weight and appearance happen and how I recommend you track your progress. This way you'll have the necessary data to assess and fix your diet and not fall victim to the inevitable stalls and whooshes along the way. This stuff is even more critical when bulking, as the rate of change is smaller.

The subsequent chapters cover how to assess and adjust your initial macro calculations if needed and then how to make mid-diet adjustments when cutting and bulking.

You are now well and truly into the heart of the book. But to stop there would leave you hanging, for how are you supposed to end your cut and transition to a bulk? What if you want to hang out at maintenance for a while? What is the best way to end a bulk phase and then transition to the cut to reveal all the muscle you have just worked so hard to gain?

This is the focus of the final few chapters before the client examples, showing you their actual progress photos and data, explaining the decisions I made along the way.

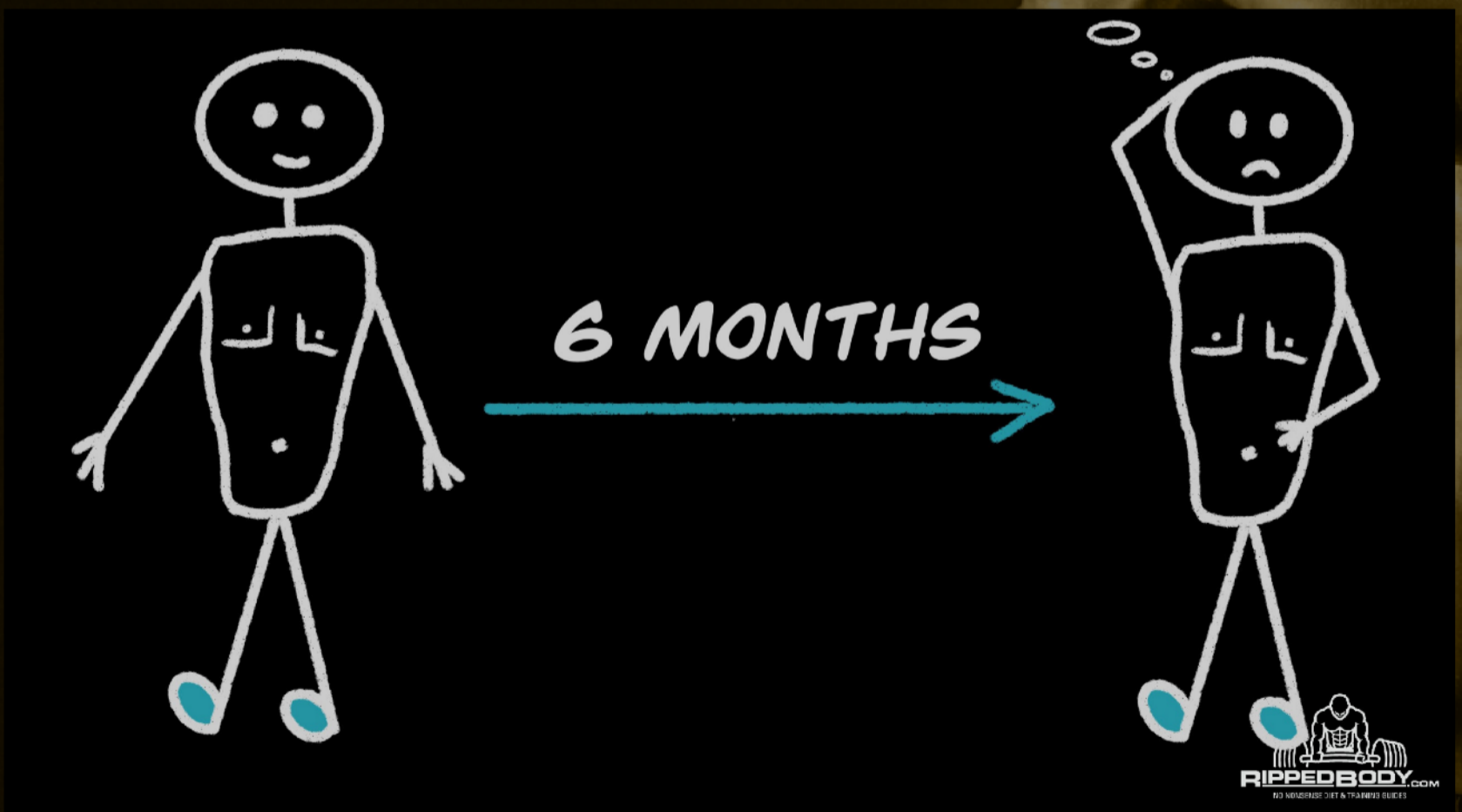
You will see that cut and bulk phases do not progress linearly. There will be fluctuations in your weight and measurements over which you have little control. However, by knowing about these things you can mentally prepare for them, objectively navigate your way through them, which ultimately means you are far more likely to be successful.

If you feel that the information was disappointingly simple after reading this, I consider my job a success. I don't have any unique tricks to offer; I get good results because I'm methodical when analyzing data and deciding whether to adjust a client's diet. When you apply the framework within, you will know exactly how to do that too.

I would recommend you read everything once through in the order it is written to get the complete picture of your journey from here, then come back to specific sections as and when you need them.

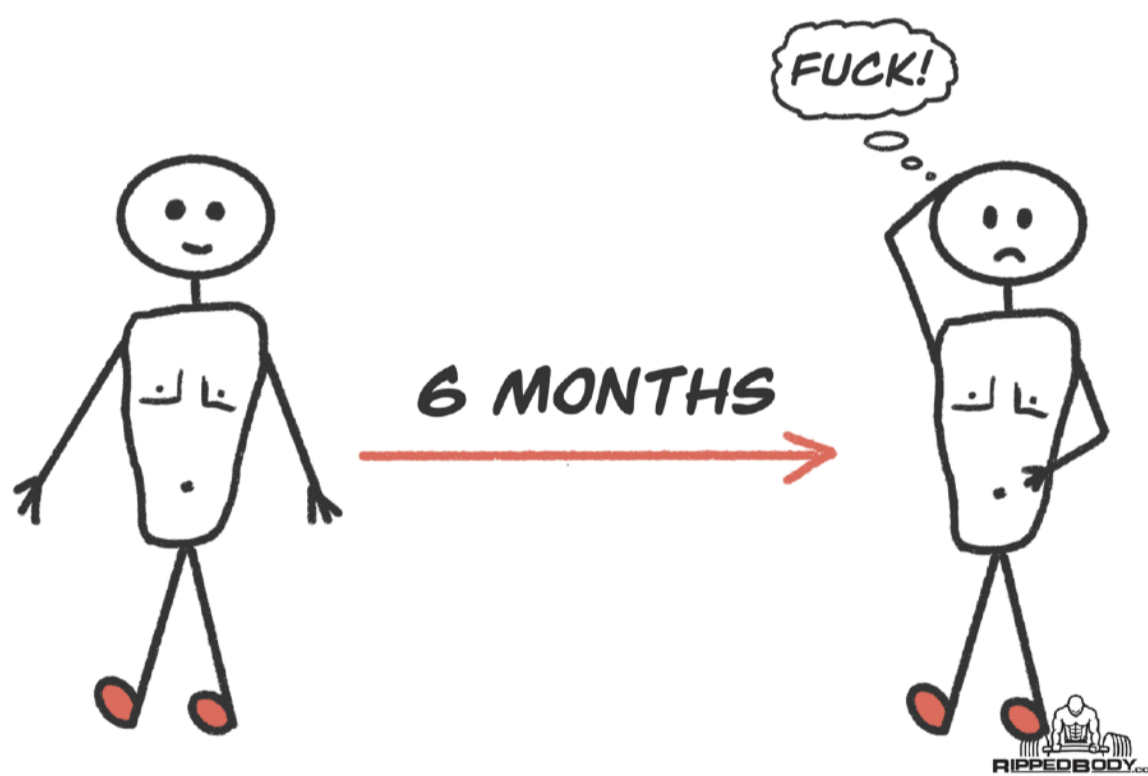
Thank you in advance for your time. Let's dive in!

WHY PEOPLE FAIL



People expect to apply for coaching and be sold. But I'm in a very fortunate position where I receive more coaching applications than I can manage. As I don't want to hire any junior coaches, I'm always looking to see if I can give a simple piece of advice that will help instead.

In the last decade, I estimate that I've read over 8000 coaching applications. Even though I have only worked with a fraction of this number, this is a lot of experience, and it runs deep.



The same patterns of why people are failing to achieve their goals come up repeatedly. This book only addresses diet adjustments, but I will list the most common issues people run into because there would be no point in going down a diet adjustment rabbit hole if the cause of your frustration lies elsewhere.

If you've been bulking and cutting with little to show for it, read this section carefully. But be warned, just because it's simple to identify doesn't mean it will be easy for you to acknowledge and fix.

1. ARE YOU TRAINING PROPERLY?

If you don't have the right training stimulus, it doesn't matter what you do with your diet; you won't get the results you desire.

There are two ways that training typically goes wrong:

1. **You are not training hard enough.** If you stop too far short of failure, you won't get a good enough training effect. It is far less common for people to push themselves too hard.
2. **You are not training with the right form.** If your form is poor, you won't hit the target muscles, and you'll cheat yourself out of the right training effect.

In general, the more you work a muscle through its natural range of motion, the better. Don't load the leg press up with more weight than you can handle, and then do half reps. Likewise, if you have to swing your body to lift the weight, you're not hitting your target muscles.

You go to the gym to exercise your muscles, not your ego. Lift under control.

Outside of hiring a competent, in-person trainer, the best investment you can make to ensure your training form is good is to purchase an online exercise video guide. [The Big 3 Basics](#) will teach you how to master the barbell lifts. [The Lifting Library](#) will show you the rest. Film yourself from the same angles. Compare your form and work to improve it.

Stay humble. This takes time and practice.

2. ARE YOU CONSISTENT ENOUGH?

To be successful, you need to be consistent. To be consistent, you need to set things up in a way you can sustain.

- 1. Make sure your training plan fits your schedule.** If your schedule only allows you to train three days a week consistently, don't choose a four-day training plan. Rearrange the training volume so that you do it in three days. See [my guide to building your own training programs](#).
- 2. Avoid binge-starve cycles.** Don't set your diet up in a way where it's so strict that you can't sustain it. There is no point in being so strict on yourself during the week that you can't help but throw it away on the weekend. Don't surround yourself with people who encourage you to do so.
- 3. Avoid complicated meal timing strategies.** [Keep meal timing simple](#). Most clients eat just two or three meals.

- 4. Cook more, eat out less.** This is the only way to know what is in your food and the only way to hit your macro targets consistently. Successful clients typically eat the same meals on rotation. [Work to develop 8-10 meals that fit your macros which you enjoy.](#)
- 5. Stop doing cardio for fat loss.** Dietary control should be the primary driver of fat loss. Adding cardio is time inefficient (as you'll see in later chapters) and not sustainable.
- 6. Train, don't exercise.** We don't exercise for fat loss; we train to deliver the appropriate stimulus to the muscles. More is not better. Don't train based on time; train for however long is necessary to complete all the exercises in your program and make sure it is appropriate. ([Here are some free options.](#))

3. DO YOU SLEEP ENOUGH?

Past a certain point, if you aren't getting enough sleep, getting more is likely the solution to your problems.

A lack of sleep will exacerbate hunger issues when dieting, making it harder to adhere.

Your training response will be poorer. This means that when bulking, less of the weight you gain will be muscle, more will be fat. When cutting, you'll have a much harder time holding onto that hard-earned muscle mass.

It's hard to say how much sleep is too little, but if you wake up feeling chronically tired, you need to get more. Ideally, your alarm clock should be an insurance policy if you don't wake up naturally at the time you would like. You should not need it to wake up on time.

Here's some advice for [getting a better night's sleep](#).

4. ARE YOU TRACKING YOUR PROGRESS PROPERLY?

Making changes when none are necessary is a key reason people fail. If you track your progress with sufficient data points, you can avoid making these bad decisions.

You are going to be hungry when you diet. You are going to feel full when you bulk. You need to consistently override your hunger and fullness cues to be successful because, except those with many years of successful experience, these cues can't be relied upon.

You're going to feel skinny some days when you diet. You're going to feel fat some days when you bulk. Using a data-driven approach will keep you motivated and stop you from making bad decisions based on whim or emotion.

As an online coach, I am dependent on progress tracking data. Most of the time, my job involves convincing clients not to change things and be patient. A consistent theme in client

feedback over the years is that without me guiding them and showing them the data, they'd have likely done something stupid like slash calories or increase them too quickly.

5. ARE YOU LETTING YOURSELF GET CONFUSED BY WEIGHT FLUCTUATIONS?

People look at short-term weight fluctuations as a sign of fat or muscle mass changes. They panic and make rash decisions, changing their calorie intake or how much they train.

This is akin to looking at ocean waves as evidence of a rise or fall in sea levels.

Your weight will fluctuate across the course of a day and across the course of a week. The trend will only be clear across the course of several weeks. You have to be patient and not let sudden changes get to you.

6. ARE YOU LOSING WEIGHT TOO QUICKLY?

In fat loss phases, people tend to eat too little or slash calories too often. This leaves them hungry and irritable, and every day becomes a struggle to sustain.

One of two things then happens: either binges become common (usually on the weekends), wiping out progress, or if they do sustain it, their training goes to shit, and they lose some,

or all, of the hard-earned muscle mass they gained during a bulking phase.

7. ARE YOU GAINING WEIGHT TOO QUICKLY?

In gaining phases, people eat too much or add calories too fast, which causes them to gain more fat than they should. They have to end the bulk prematurely or put up with being unhappy with their appearance.

8. DO YOU QUIT YOUR CUT AND BULK PHASES TOO EARLY?

People stop cutting too early because they start to feel skinny. They decide to move to a bulk phase.

People stop bulking too early because they are unhappy with the fat they have gained. They decide to switch to a cut phase.

This can become a vicious cycle. It is excruciatingly common.

Fat gain happens in even the most well-planned and executed bulk phases. If you stop bulking early, you won't have gained enough muscle mass to notice it when you cut.

If you don't allow yourself to get lean enough when you cut, you won't be able to bulk long enough before feeling too fat to continue.

The solution is to get leaner than you would ideally like when cutting and accept that you will get a little fatter than you would ideally like when bulking.

9. ARE YOU ATTEMPTING THE 'ETERNAL' RECOMP?

If your weight is the same and your appearance (or stomach measurements) aren't changing, you aren't achieving anything other than maintenance. This is fine if that's your goal, but as you're reading this, I know it is not.

Sadly, most non-noob gym-goers look the same as they did 6, 12, or even 18 months ago. If you ask them what they're trying to achieve, they will tell you to gain muscle and lose fat. But if you ask them what they've changed with their diet or training to accomplish that, you quickly see that very little strategic thought has been given to either of these things.

The reason they are stagnant is that their habits, hunger cues, and food environment combine to only maintain their weight, and their training is no longer sufficient to drive adaptation. I call these people ***the absent-minded majority***. If you are reading this book, you are not in this category, but many of your gym friends might be.

Some people are stuck despite paying close attention to their diets, purposefully sitting at caloric maintenance, attempting to

chase a simultaneous muscle gain and fat loss goal. This is called a body recomposition goal, or *'recomp'*.

Either it's no longer working, and they haven't realized it, or they refuse to transition to a cut or bulk, hoping that one small training, diet, or supplement tweak will change things for them. I call these people ***the wishful-thinking minority***.

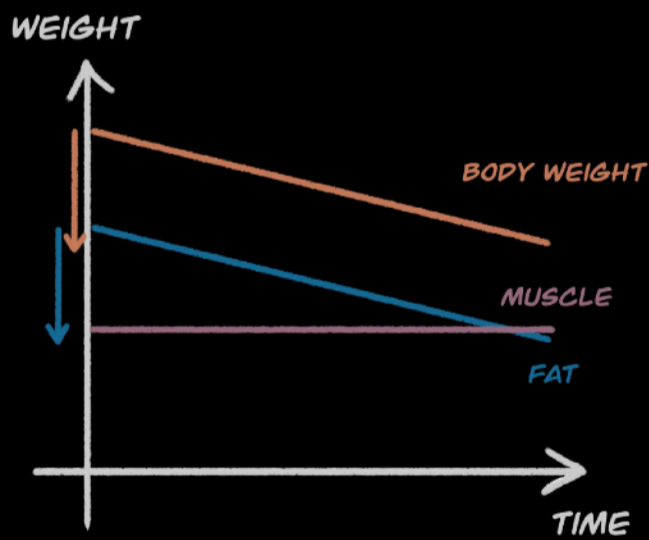
If you are training, sleeping, and eating well, and you are no longer progressing while at maintenance, you need to transition into a bulk or cutting phase.

SUMMARY OF WHY PEOPLE FAIL

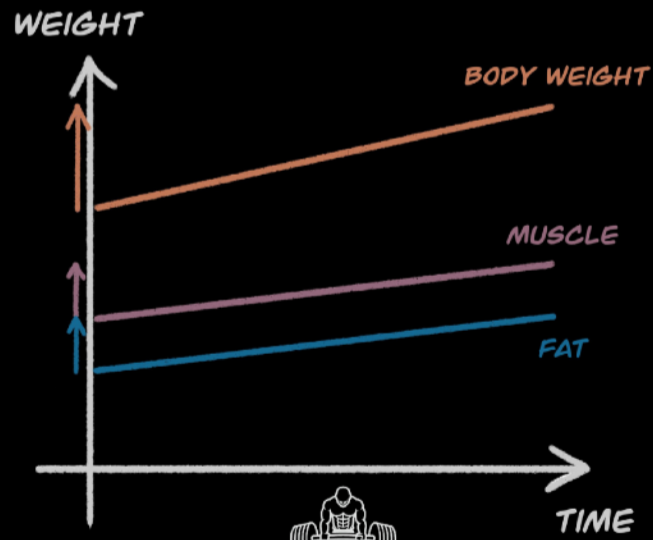
If you've identified that your issue lies with training, consistency, or sleep, follow the links and work on those things *first*. The rest of this book will focus on systematically fixing the latter issues, and many others.

TO CUT, BULK, OR RECOMP?

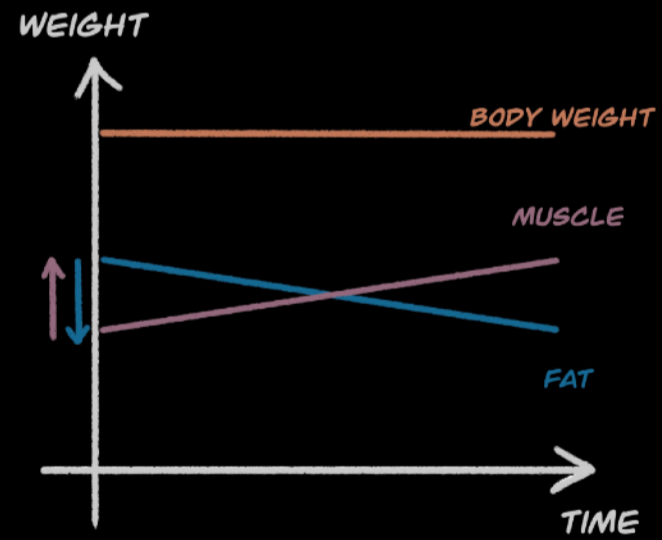
CUT



BULK



RECOMP



I've talked about this extensively elsewhere, but as it's such an essential part of this, you'll have to forgive me for doing so again.

When using the [calorie and macro calculator](#) to set up your diet, you'll have had to choose a goal: cut, bulk, or recomp.

- ▶ **Cutting Phase** – weight loss with a focus on fat loss.
- ▶ **Bulking Phase** – weight gain with the goal of muscle gain while minimizing fat gain.
- ▶ **Recomp** – weight maintenance with a goal of muscle gain and fat loss.

The main difference between these three options is calorie intake.

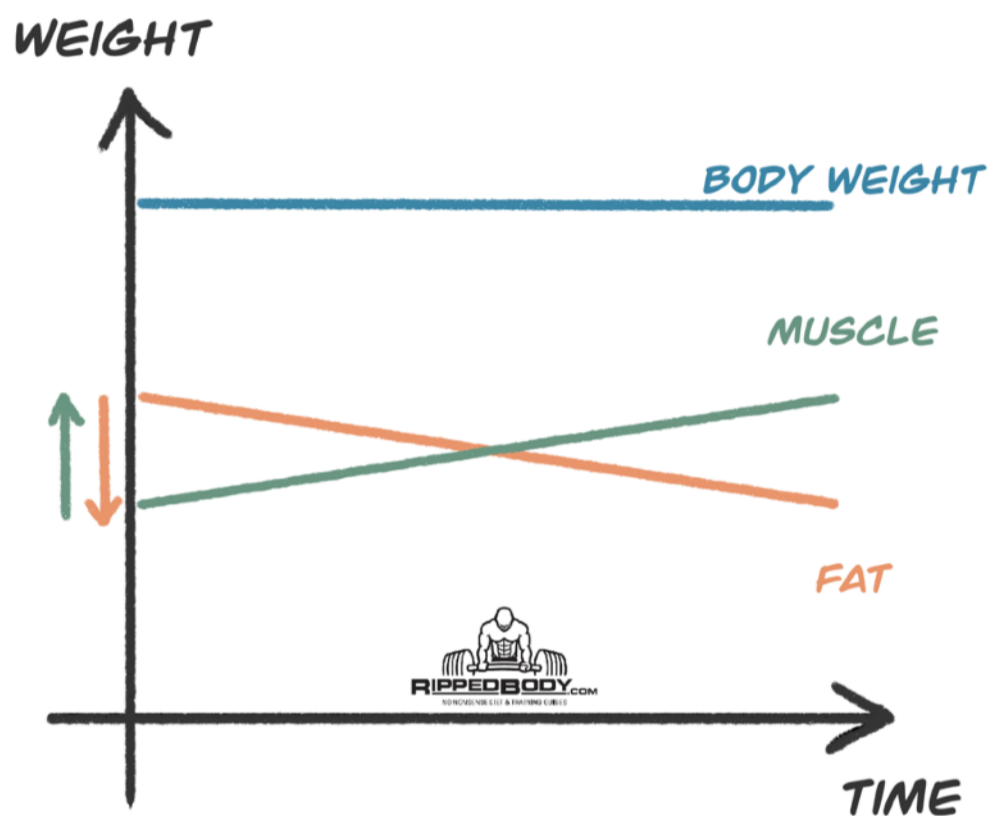
The training will not drastically differ between the three, though the maximal training volume you can benefit from when bulking will be higher.

For most people, the choice between cutting or bulking is clear. However, some people feel totally lost when they see the *recomp* option. They feel neither muscled enough to cut nor lean enough to be happy if they bulk and gain some more fat. So the idea that they can set the calculator to a “recomp” and achieve both at the same time seems like the holy grail.

Unfortunately, though a degree of body recomposition can happen at any stage of your training career, the rate at which

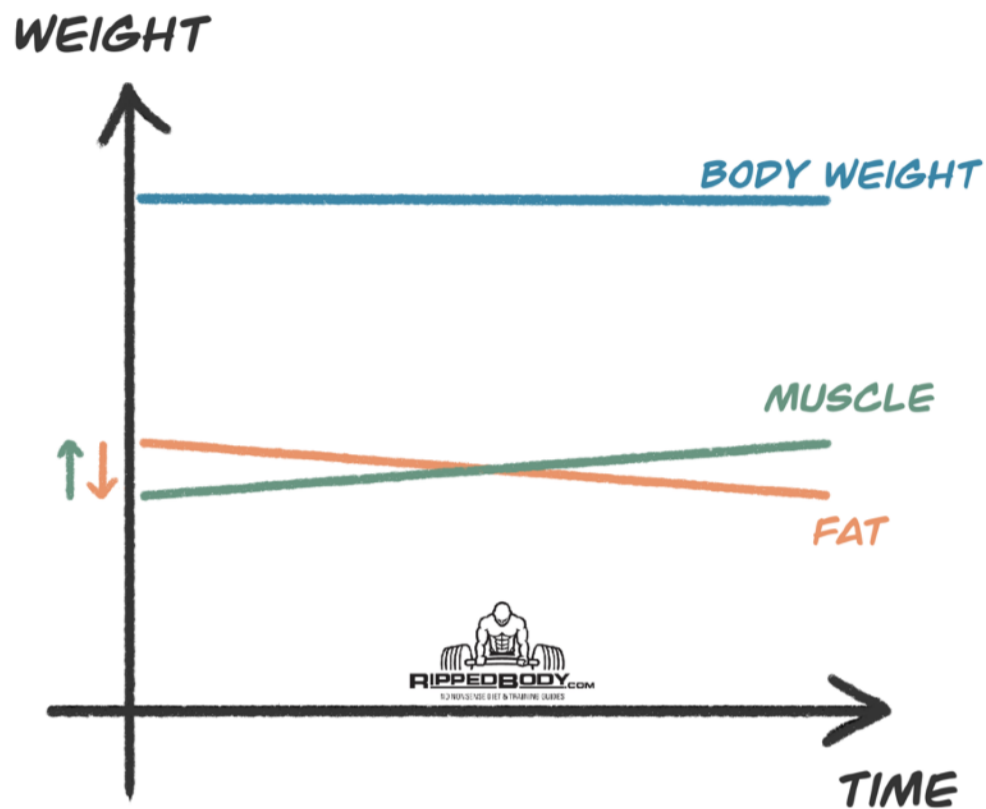
we can achieve it diminishes with training experience. Further, *neither fat loss nor muscle gain can be maximized while recomping.*

So while a novice trainee may achieve a reasonable amount of simultaneous muscle growth and fat loss:



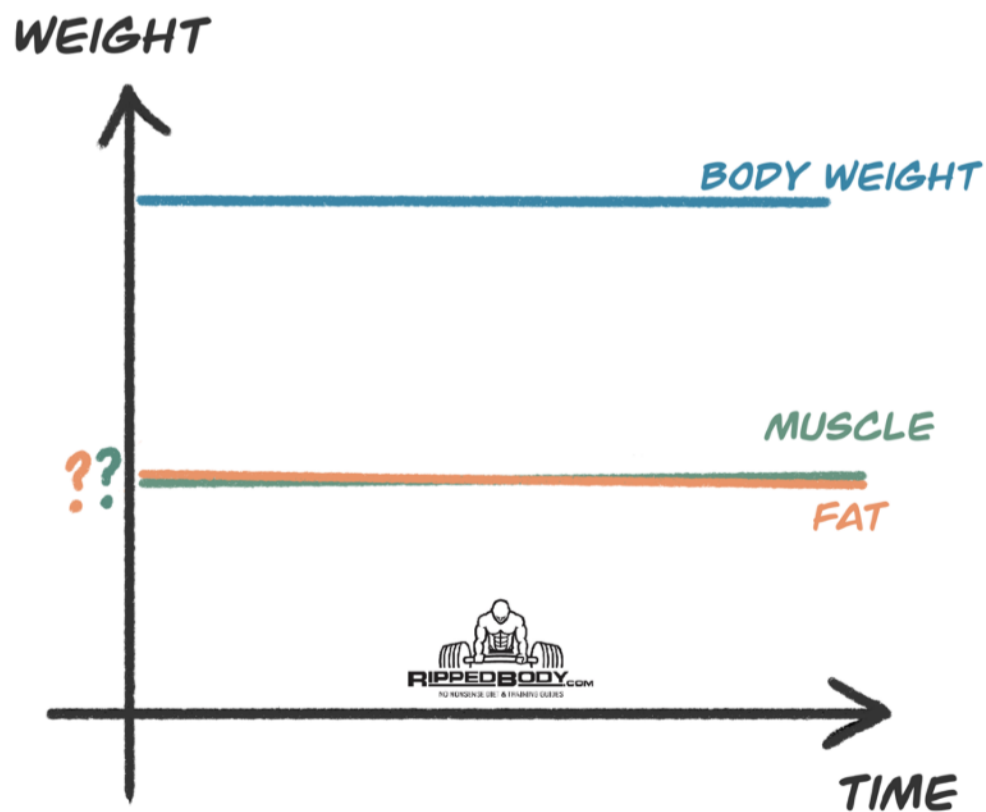
What the **novice** trainee experiences when trying to recomp.

The changes that a more experienced trainee will see are diminished:



What the **intermediate** trainee experiences when trying to recomp.

And past a certain point, the changes are all but imperceptible:



What the **advanced** trainee experiences when trying to recomp.

Now you might be thinking, *“Ahah! I’m not a novice, but I’m certainly not advanced. So I’ll sit at maintenance calorie intake for the next couple of years and become huge and shredded!”*

But outside of those who are genetically gifted when it comes to size and leanness, the reality is that it rarely happens.

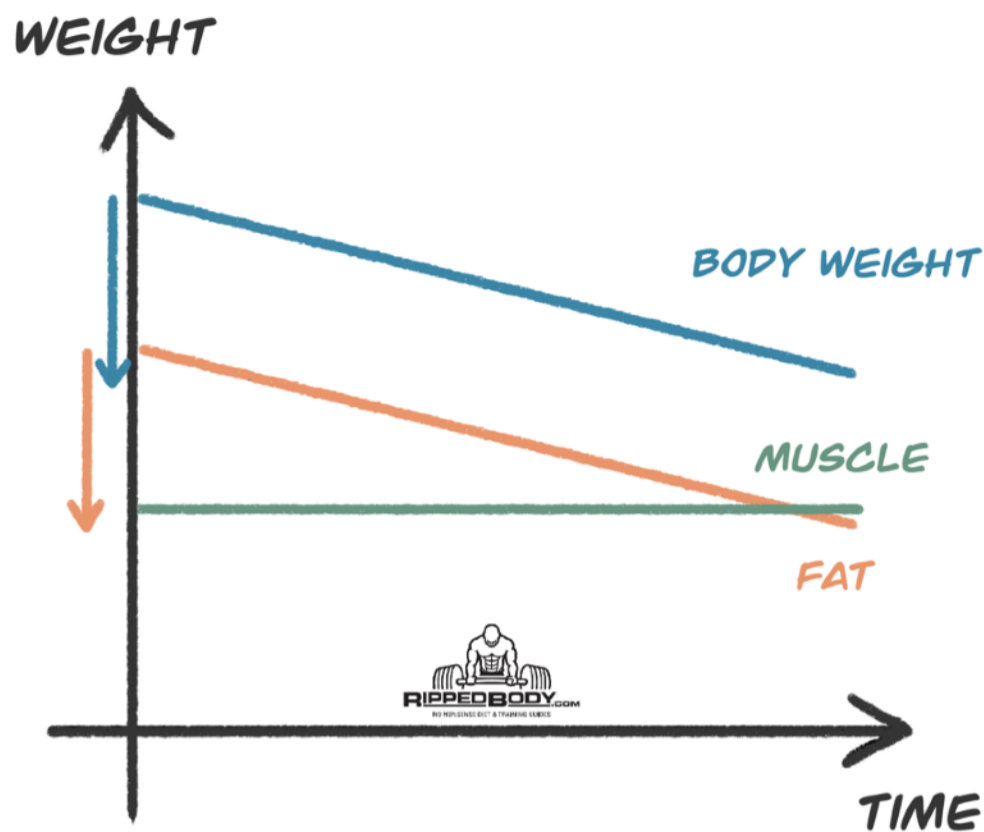
When progress is hard to measure, it is *exceptionally* hard to manage and stay motivated. So while it is fine to give a recomp a shot for a few months if you are unsure whether you can achieve it, most people will find the greatest success by building their physiques over time by alternating between fat loss and muscle gain phases.

This means that while our start points may differ, the rest of our paths to our genetic potential all converge on alternating between cutting and bulking phases.

The rest of this chapter will explain what I recommend you to do given your start point. But first, I need to explain what realistic expectations are of each.

EXPECTATIONS WHEN CUTTING

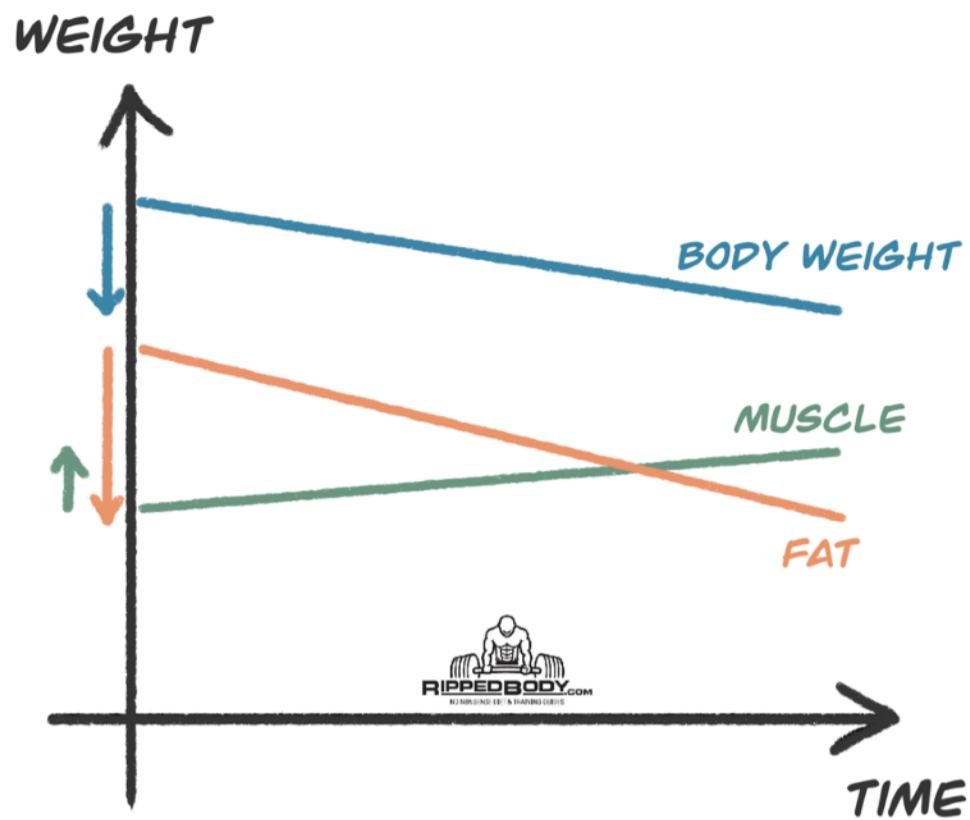
When you cut, your goal should be to drop the fat off while maintaining your muscle mass.



The typical cut, where muscle mass is maintained.

You may be able to gain some muscle, but this should be considered a bonus. The fatter you are and the less training experience you have, the greater your opportunity to do so. But any muscle gain achieved while cutting will be subtle, if noticeable at all. This is because you'll lose fat at a faster rate, and this fat loss happens from all areas of the body, so your limb measurements will not get bigger. — On the contrary, you can expect to get smaller everywhere as you lean out.

So, keep your eye on the goal: fat loss, which will be gauged primarily by weight loss. Put your muscle growth goals on hold for a while as you cut.



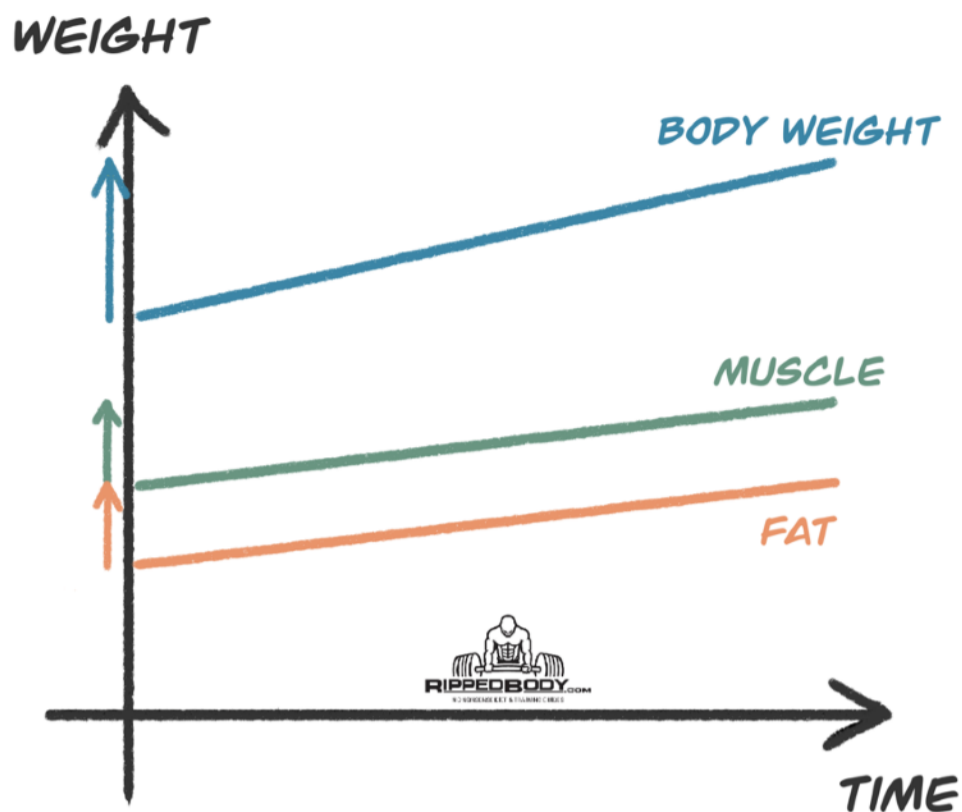
A cutting phase where some muscle mass is gained.

EXPECTATIONS WHEN BULKING

With the exception of those underweight and new to training, it is not reasonable to expect to gain muscle without fat along with it. Typically, I see clients gain fat and muscle in a 1:1 ratio, but genetics play a role.

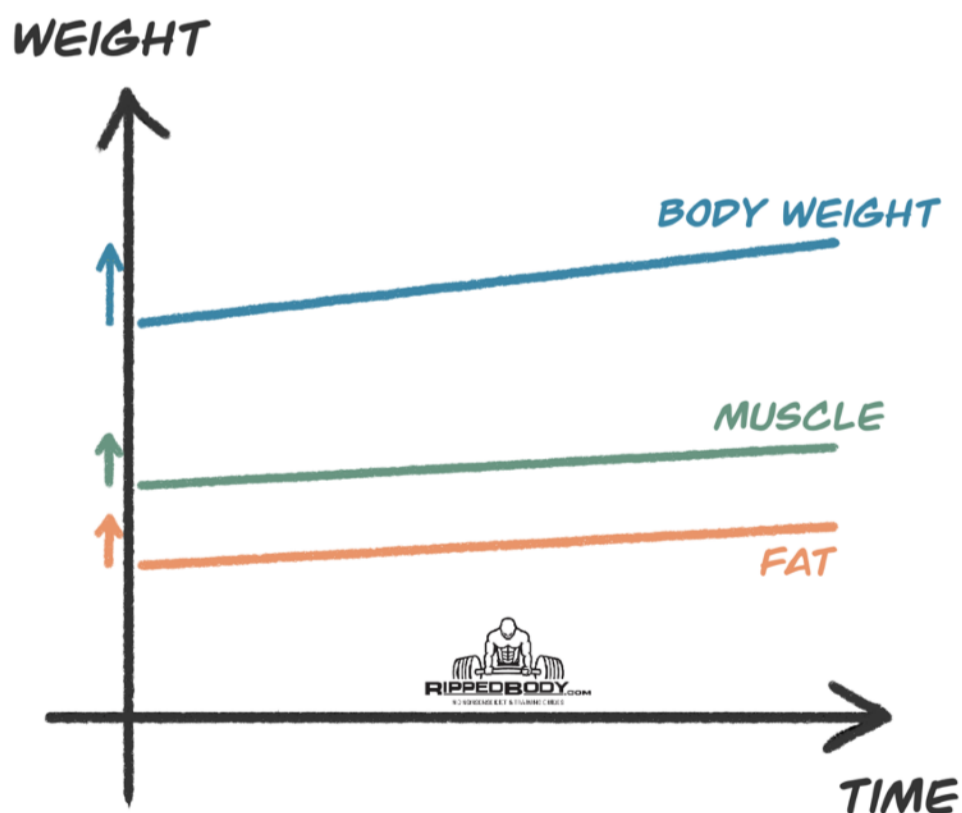
Regardless of your genetic luck, you will have to sacrifice your leanness as you bulk, and it's silly to expect anything less. Accepting a little fat gain is better than trying (and failing) to recomp for months on end, and the progress is far easier to measure and stay motivated for.

In general, the less training experience you have, the further you are away from your genetic potential, and the faster you can gain muscle.



What the novice trainee experiences when they bulk.

The more experience you have, the slower you can gain muscle, and the more patience is required.



What the intermediate trainee experiences when they bulk.

I'll come back to recommended rates of weight gain in the next chapter, but the point I want to make for now is that while you

know that you'll *eventually* settle on alternating between cut and bulk phases to build your physique, the important question is, **what should you do *right now*?**

The following section covers how I suggest you think about it.

CHOOSING A STARTING GOAL: WHEN THE DECISION IS OBVIOUS

- ▶ If you are overweight or carry a large amount of body fat, I recommend that you cut.
- ▶ If you are underweight or already lean enough to see your abs and wish to get bigger, I recommend that you bulk.
- ▶ If you're an inexperienced trainee, not particularly fat nor skinny, I recommend you recomp.

If you don't fit any of the three options above, I need you to estimate your body-fat percentage. Use the visual guide to body-fat percentage in the next chapter. Feel free to combine this with another estimation method, but be aware that they all have accuracy issues. (More on this later.)

WHEN TO STOP BULKING

We need to bulk for long enough to gain a meaningful amount of muscle before we cut. If we end the bulk too early, the entire

bulk-cut phase can end in frustration at the lack of clear progress.

We need to get lean enough before starting so that we don't end the bulk too early because of our unhappiness with the inevitable fat gain. This often means getting a little leaner than we'd ideally like so that you aren't unhappy a few short months after you commence bulking.

We each have a threshold for our tolerance on how much fat we can carry before we wish to end the bulk. Some people don't give much of a shit and are happy to bulk for a very long time, gaining a bunch of fat. But I'd encourage you to consider an upper limit on body fat of ~20%, as past this point, the health risks increase, and the proceeding cut will be dauntingly long.

HOW LONG TO BULK – AVOID FREQUENT 'MINI CUTS'

Some people are overly-sensitive to fat gain, and they try to stay lean when bulking, which is a mistake that takes two forms.

The first is not increasing calorie intake enough to gain a meaningful amount of weight.

The second is to insert 'mini cuts' – short periods of dieting interspersed in a bulk phase with the idea of 'cleaning up' the fat gained when bulking. I cringe whenever I hear the phrase.

The problem is that people try to do it too often, and this interrupts the anabolic process. (It can take the body a while to recover hormonally after dieting to a point where it is ready to grow again.)

For this reason, I recommend you bulk for a minimum of five months. During those five months, you must hit certain, pre-determined, weight gain targets. (More on this in the next chapter.)

This means that we need to be lean enough when we start bulking to allow for five months of body weight gain. Therefore, if we put this together with the 20% threshold, we get the following recommendations:

- ▶ **If you're an experienced trainee over 16% body fat, I recommend you cut.**
- ▶ **If you're an experienced trainee under 16% body fat, cut or bulk, as per your preference.**

WHEN TO STOP CUTTING

If your plan is to bulk straight after you cut, I recommend you stop when you reach approximately 10% body fat. (See the next chapter for a visual reference. Also, the majority of [clients on the results page](#) are all 8-11% body fat.) Getting leaner than 10% body fat doesn't offer an advantage for a subsequent bulking

phase, and can be counter-productive, as the body is primed for fat regain.

▶ **I recommend you stop cutting when you reach 9-10% body fat.**

The majority of clients find the sweet spot to be 10% body fat for the end of their cutting phases and ~15% for their bulk phases. You may find you prefer a higher range because you feel or perform better but do not think you can do it effectively at a lower range. *You will not make progress if you attempt to stay shredded lean all year round.*

▶ **I recommend you set a maximum upper limit of 20% body fat when bulking, though many prefer to keep this lower.**

SUMMARY OF WHEN TO CUT, BULK, OR RECOMP

CATEGORY OF TRAINEE	RECOMMENDATION
Overweight	Cut
Underweight	Bulk
Inexperienced trainee in the 13–18% body-fat range	Recomp
Experienced trainee over 16% body fat	Cut
Experienced trainee under 16% body fat	Cut or bulk, as per preference
When bulking, suggested upper body fat limit to switch to a cut	20%
When cutting, suggested lower body fat limit to switch to a bulk	9–10%

Note: Women carry more 'essential body fat' and should add ~8% to all these numbers.

A VISUAL GUIDE TO BODY-FAT PERCENTAGE



It is my experience that people rarely warm to you when being told that they are fatter than they think. Unfortunately, this is something I have to do daily.

“Bob, I’m sorry, but you’re not going to drop 10 pounds and be shredded lean. You need to lose 30.”

People hire me to help them get results. If I were in the habit of exaggerating when people inquire about coaching, I'd quickly get a bad reputation and wouldn't still be here a decade later.

In the previous chapter, I talked about using body-fat percentage to guide your decisions on when to cut, bulk, and recomp. But as I will cover in the chapter on progress tracking, all the body-fat measurement methods we have available have horrible inaccuracies on an individual level (up to 8% error rates on the most common devices).

This puts us both in a tricky situation. On the one hand, I need to tell you to use body-fat percentage to guide an important decision, but on the other, I'm saying, “But all the ways we have of measuring body-fat percentage are flawed!”

This is where this visual guide comes in. Fortunately, I had a decade of client result photos to draw from when creating it, and it's been a wonderful trip down memory lane.

(If you'd like to share this with your friends, I have a version on the website [here](#).)

BEFORE YOU TRY TO COMPARE YOURSELF

- 1. I've always judged body-fat percentage by eye.** I have no way of knowing if the categorizations you will see below are correct, but if you pair this guide with the recommendations on when to bulk vs. cut, it will help guide your decisions.
- 2. The more muscle mass you have, the higher your body fat level you will have visible abs at.** The guys below all have training experience. You can't expect to cut and reveal decent abs if you don't have muscle mass. This may lead you to underestimate your body fat percentage.
- 3. Most people underestimate how much body fat they have to lose.** If you haven't cut down to see your abs before and you are trying to estimate how much fat you have to lose, add 50 percent, and you're probably closer to the truth.
- 4. If you're still unsure after looking at the images,** consider using my [US Navy Body-fat Percentage Estimation Calculator](#), which just requires your neck and stomach circumference measurements and height.
- 5. The guys are all flexing (tensing the muscles).** If you look closely, you'll see that nearly all of these guys have both before and after photos included.

















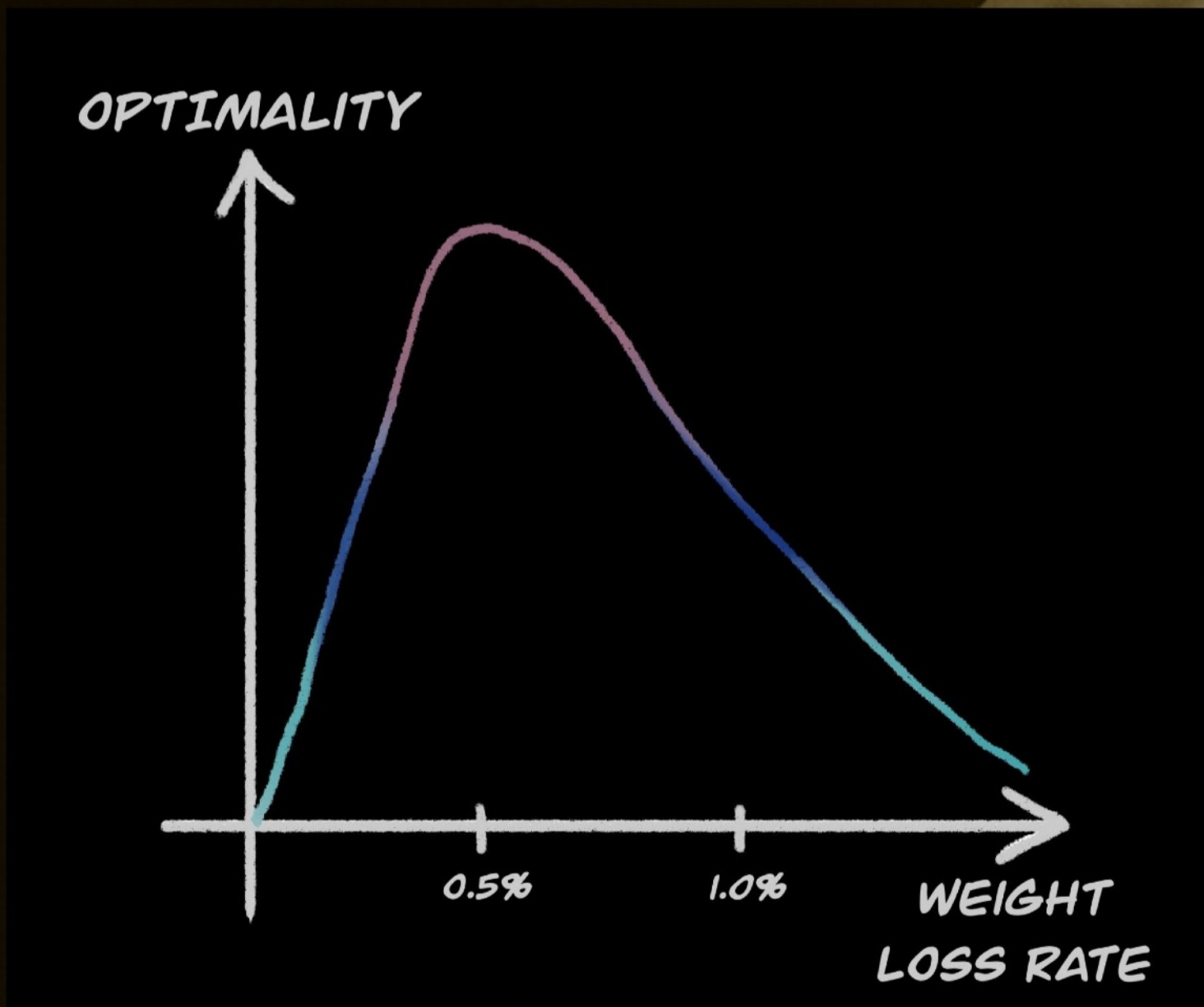


A VISUAL GUIDE TO BODY-FAT PERCENTAGE FOR WOMEN

I can't make a female version based on client photos because I only work with men. However, here's the guide from [The Muscle and Strength Pyramid: Nutrition](#) book.



HOW QUICKLY TO CUT AND BULK



Everyone wants results quickly, but if you push things further than you should, you shoot yourself in the foot. This brief chapter will teach you how not to do that.

RECOMMENDED RATES OF BODYWEIGHT LOSS

I have some sad news to share: we can't just starve ourselves and gut through the hunger to expedite fat loss. We'll lose hard-earned muscle if we lose weight too fast.

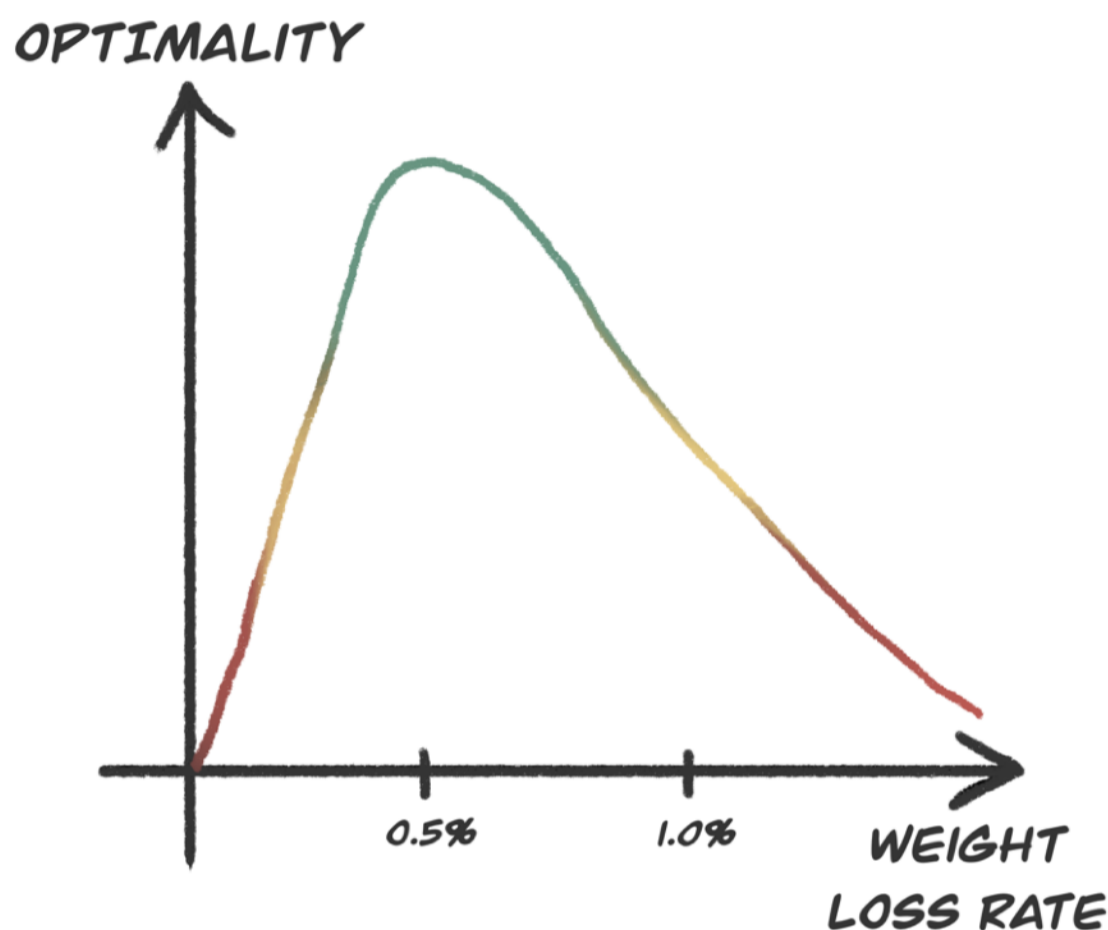
How fast?

Well, in the past, I have said that the body burns fuels in the ratio it has them available. But this is an overstatement. My intention was to point out that we can take things faster when we have a lot of fat to lose, but we need to be more conservative as we get leaner. Muscle loss becomes increasingly likely with high deficits as the body struggles to access, mobilize, and burn off our stored fat.

I recommend you lose weight no faster than 0.5–1% of your body weight per week. The fatter you are, the higher you can go in that range. The leaner you are, the closer to 0.5% you should be.

That said, even if you can get away with losing weight at 1% of your body weight per week, it may not be best to attempt to do so. — Yes, you want fast enough changes to stay motivated, but you have to keep things sustainable also. So even if you have a

lot of weight to lose, consider capping your weight loss target at 0.75%.



*Optimal rates of bodyweight loss **per week** when cutting*

Weight loss recommendations do not depend on strength training experience, unlike when bulking.

So what do these numbers mean in terms of body weight loss for the average person?

- ▶ I typically recommend most clients shoot for 1–1.25 pounds of fat loss per week (~0.4–0.5 kg).
- ▶ I may recommend that an obese client go a little faster (1.25–1.5 pounds per week), but I don't recall a single client losing more than this *over a sustained period*, and I recommend you resist the temptation to try to go faster.

- ▶ If you are particularly short, light, or lean, then 0.75 pounds (~0.35 kg) per week may be more appropriate.

RECOMMENDED RATES OF BODYWEIGHT GAIN

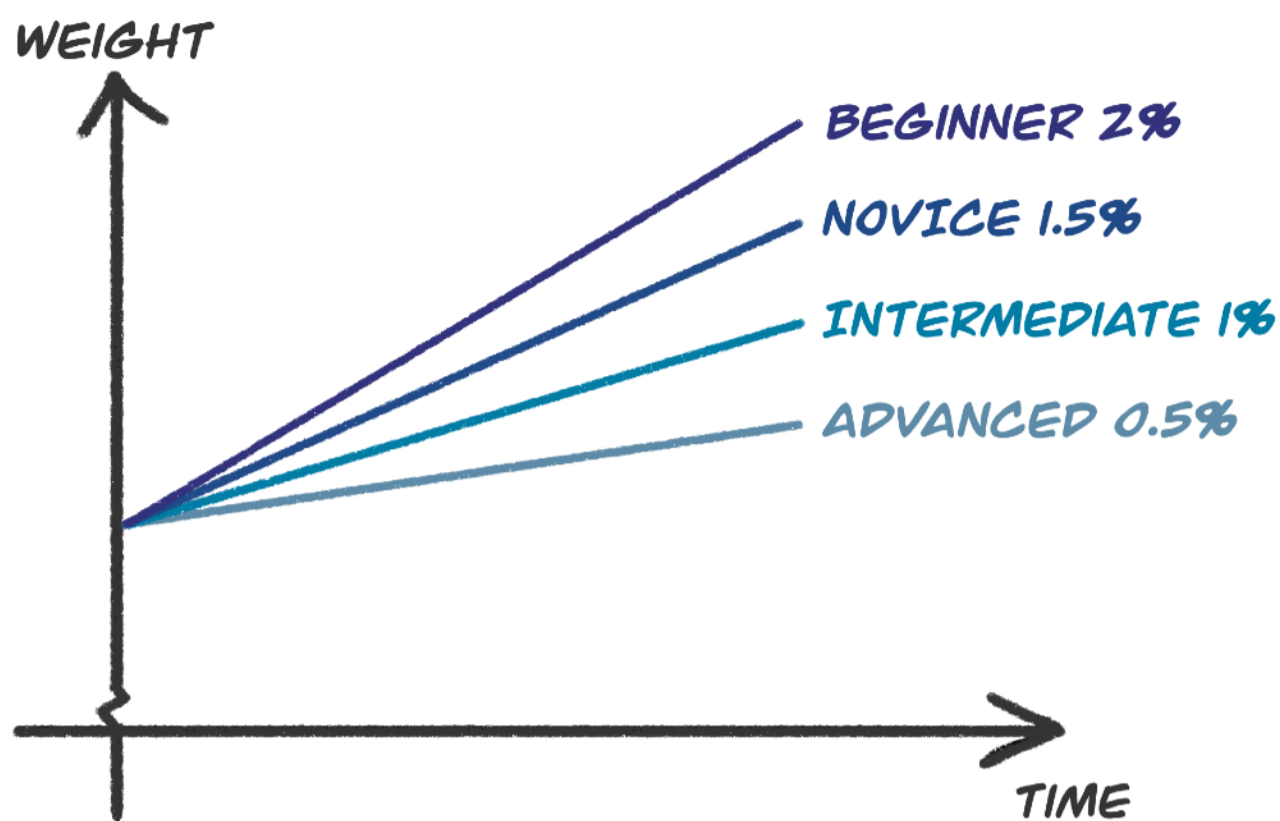
I have some more sad news to share: there is a limit to how quickly we can gain muscle.

I'd love to tell you that you can eat your face off and get super jacked, but that's how people get fat.

Generally speaking, the newer you are to serious training, the further you'll be from your genetic potential, and the faster you can grow.

No matter what you do, some fat will be gained along with muscle. Those more genetically blessed will gain more muscle than fat; those not genetically blessed will gain more fat than muscle.

It's prudent to assume you'll be somewhere in the middle as that's what is statistically likely. For this reason, recommendations on body weight gain per month depend on training experience level.



Optimal rates of bodyweight gain **per month** when bulking.

If you've played a lot of sports or done a lot of manual labor, you may already have the adaptations of a more advanced trainee than your gym time would suggest. If this applies to you, even if you are new to strength training, it might be prudent to set your weight gain rate as an intermediate trainee.

If you gain weight faster than these guidelines, you won't gain more muscle, you will only get fatter, and you then have to spend longer cutting afterward.

If you gain weight slower than these guidelines, you won't gain more muscle relative to fat, and you'll merely make everything harder. — Progress in the gym is limited, training is less fun, and the physical changes are harder to measure. This makes dietary changes harder to manage, and it's harder to stay motivated.

So what do these numbers mean in terms of body weight gain for the average person?

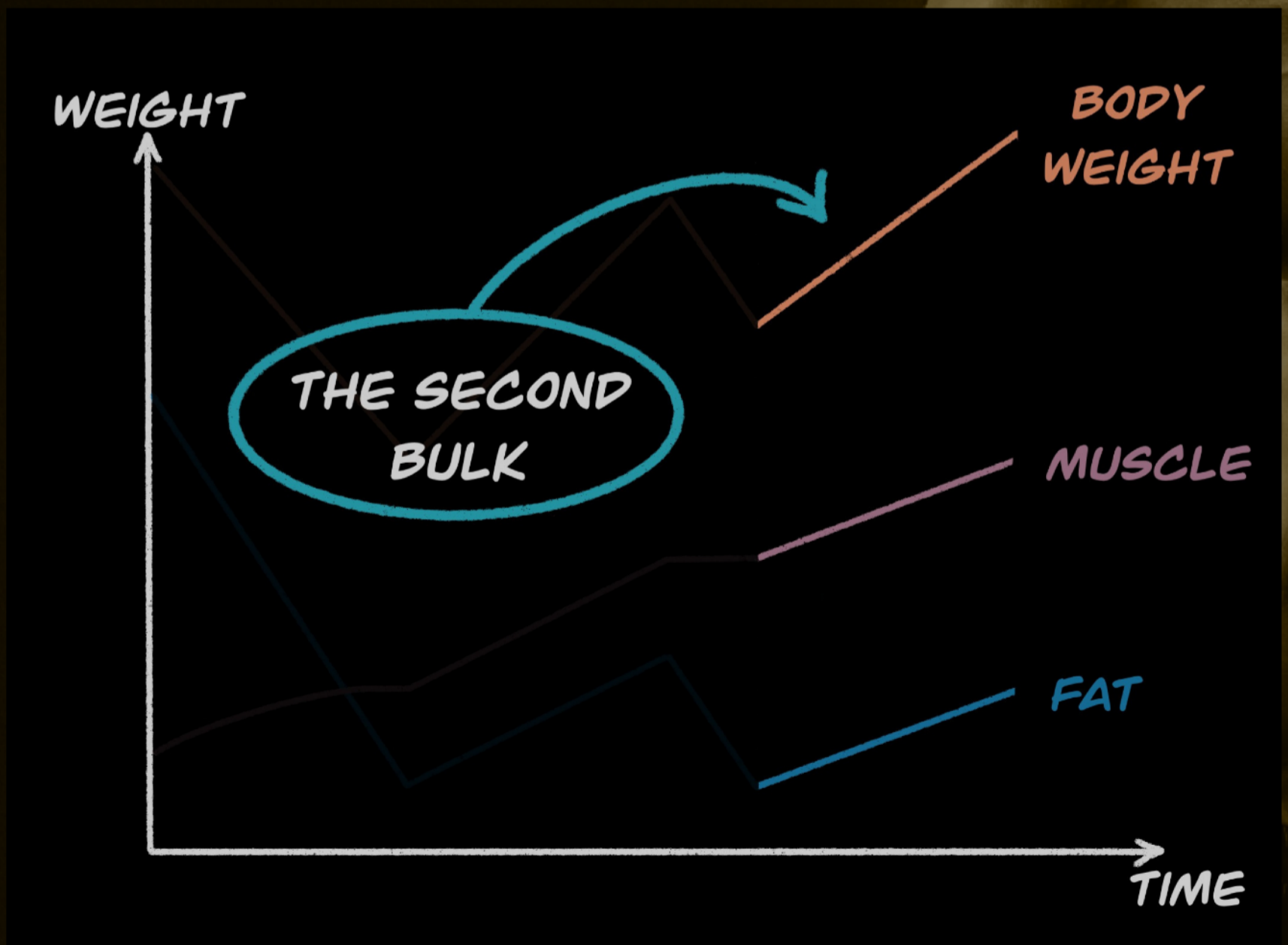
- ▶ My weight gain recommendation to clients almost always falls in the 2-3 pounds per month range.

FINAL NOTE

When cutting, you'll likely aim to lose 4-5 pounds (~1.8-2.3 kg) per month. When bulking, you'll likely aim to gain 2-3 pounds (0.9-1.4 kg) per month. If your calculations fall outside of these ranges, double check your math.

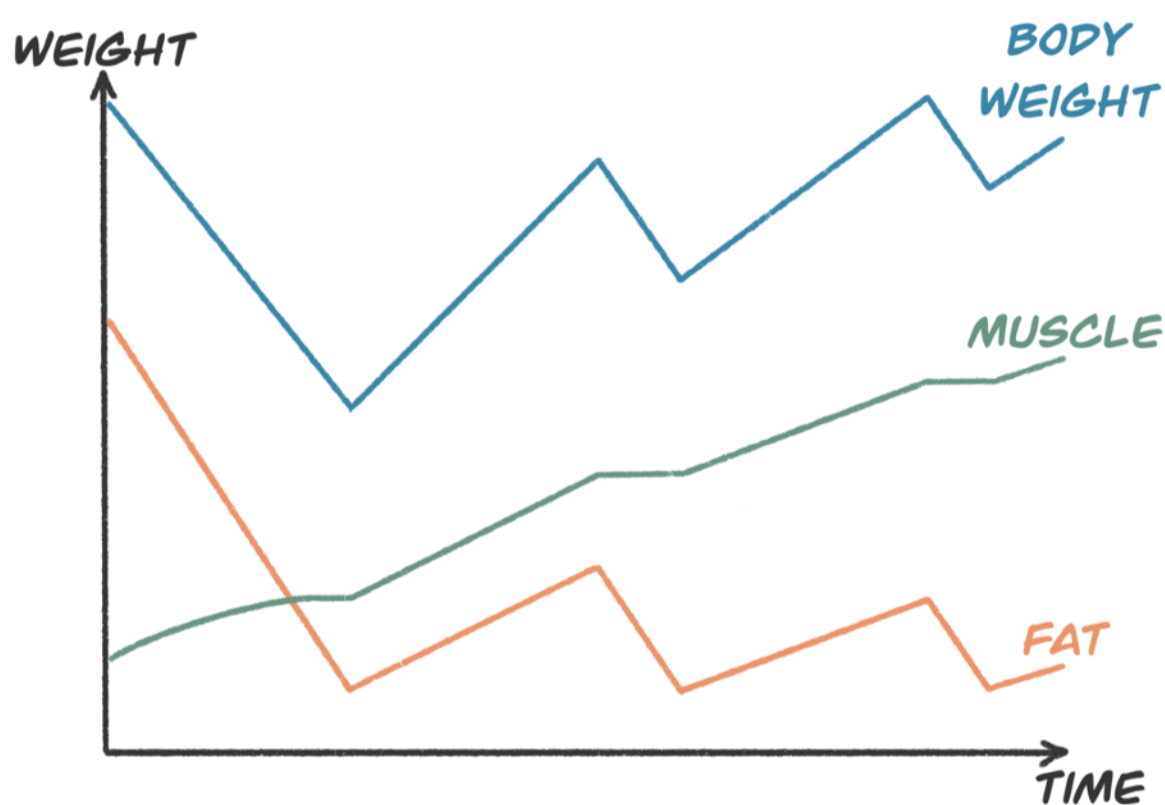
Bulking phases have nearly half the rate of weight change so they require considerably more patience. The punishment for lacking patience is that you get fat.

HOW CUT AND BULK CYCLES LOOK



Except for those who are ready to bulk or give a recomp a shot, the rest of us should lean out first and repeat bulk and cut phases over the years as we work toward our genetic potential.

The blue line in the sketch below shows how bodyweight changes over time during the first cut and then two proceeding bulk-cut phases.



The path most people take when working toward their genetic potential.

Note how two years of hard work later, you might weigh the same as you did when you began. You'll look completely different because you're leaner and more muscled, but this can be hard to accept at the outset when you don't have an idea of how you'll look.

Most men seem to have been brainwashed into believing they need to be 220 lbs and shredded to look good, and they have a mental barrier to seeing their weight go below a certain number.

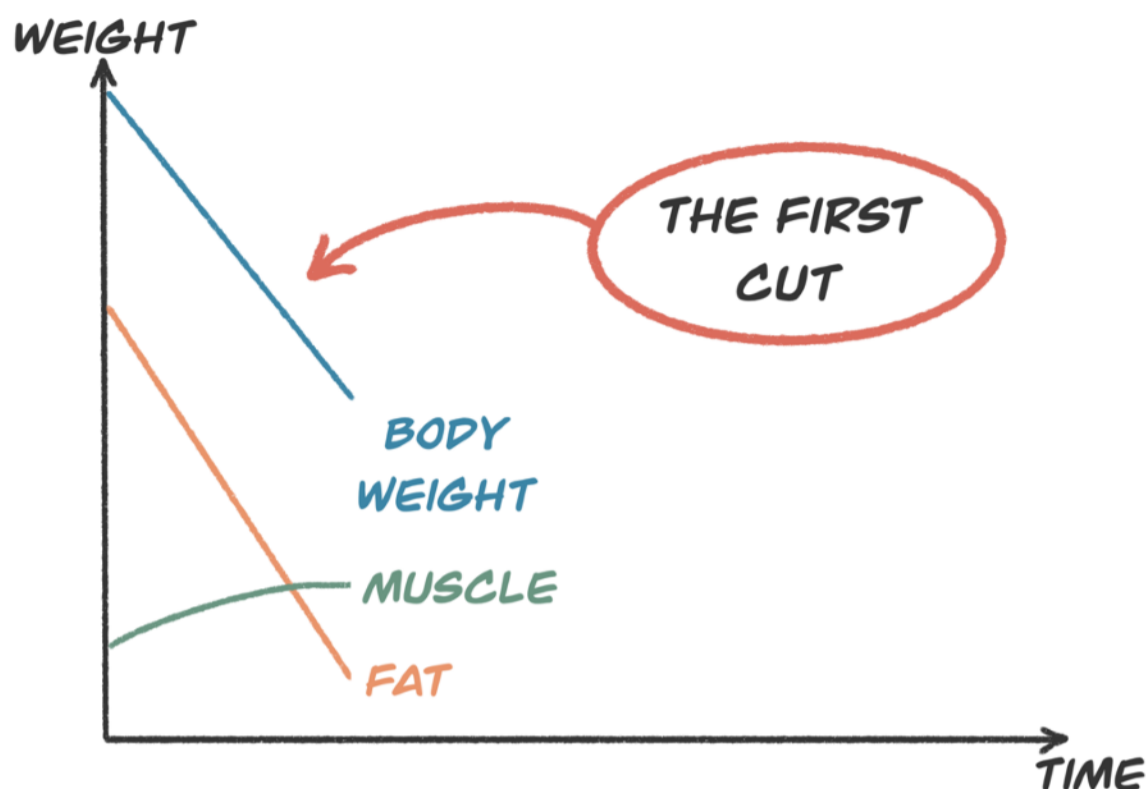
Women, on the other hand, have been brainwashed into believing that lighter is better and any gain in weight is bad.

Both of these mentalities stop us from reaching our potential, which can only be achieved if we let our weight purposefully rise and fall over time.

You can see in the sketch that fat mass (the orange line) rises and falls with each bulk and cut phase, respectively. This is particularly hard because it can give a sense that we are “losing our hard-earned leanness” when we bulk, which is true to an extent, but it’s the cost of gaining muscle mass (the green line). The goal is to slowly gain muscle mass in phases over time while managing our total fat mass.

Allow me to take you through each stage of this cut, bulk-cut, bulk-cut cycle in more detail.

PHASE 1: THE FIRST CUT



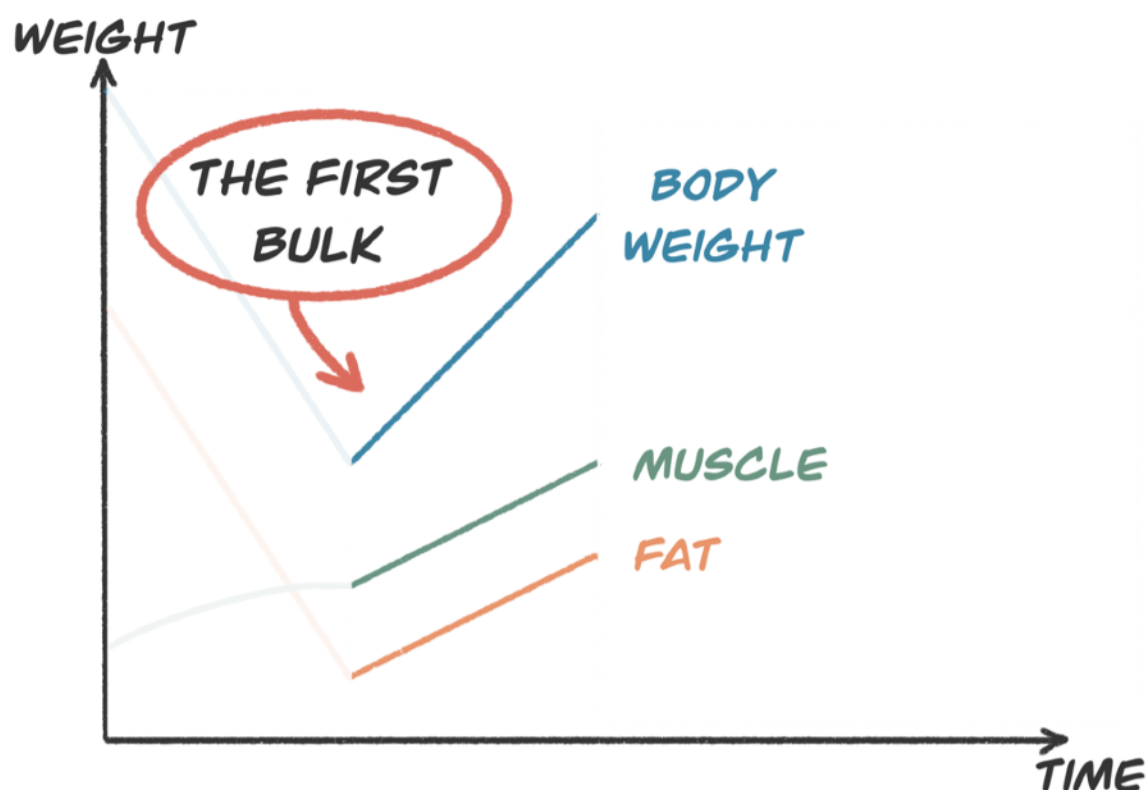
First cut body weight, muscle, and fat mass changes.

Your first cut's goal is to get lean enough before you bulk that you don't quit it too early because you feel too fat.

It will be hard in many ways. You carry less muscle mass than you think (this is true of everyone) which is a humbling experience. You will probably need to get leaner than you would ideally like and may feel skinny. Make sure you push through this discomfort.

You may gain a little muscle, but it will taper off toward the end of the cut. You probably won't notice the muscle gain given the greater magnitude of fat loss.

PHASE 2: THE FIRST BULK



First bulk body weight, muscle, and fat mass changes.

During your first bulk, you are the furthest from your genetic potential, and the muscle gain will be the fastest if you do things right. Set your rate of body weight gain at either the beginner or novice level.

The rate of weight regain may be similar to the rate at which you lost weight during the first cut, but this time half of it will be muscle.

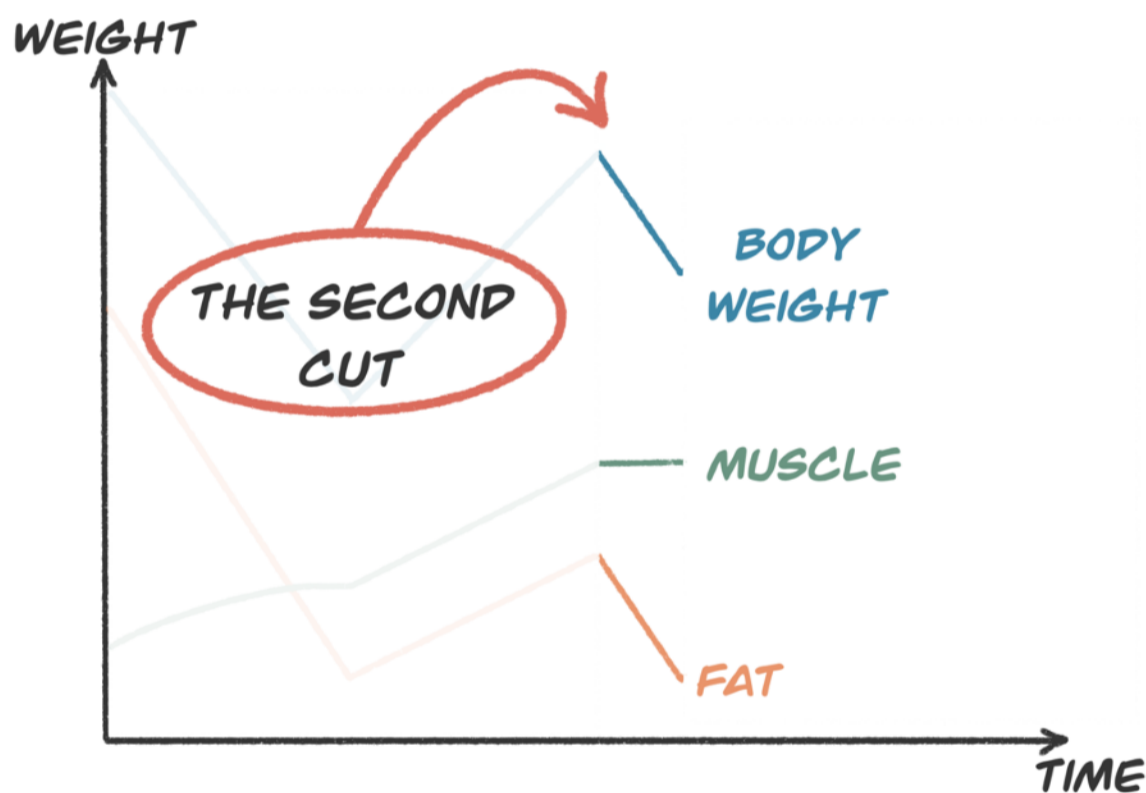
The fat regain on the stomach, and a loss of abdominal definition may give you the feeling you are merely putting back on the fat you just lost rather than gaining muscle. This is a common concern, push through it and focus on the things in your control:

- ▶ Sleep well,
- ▶ Keep stress low,

- ▶ Train appropriately hard,
- ▶ Eat so that you gain weight at an appropriate rate for your level of experience.

The results are then out of your hands and down to the genetic gods. Try to relax and trust in the process.

PHASE 3: THE SECOND CUT



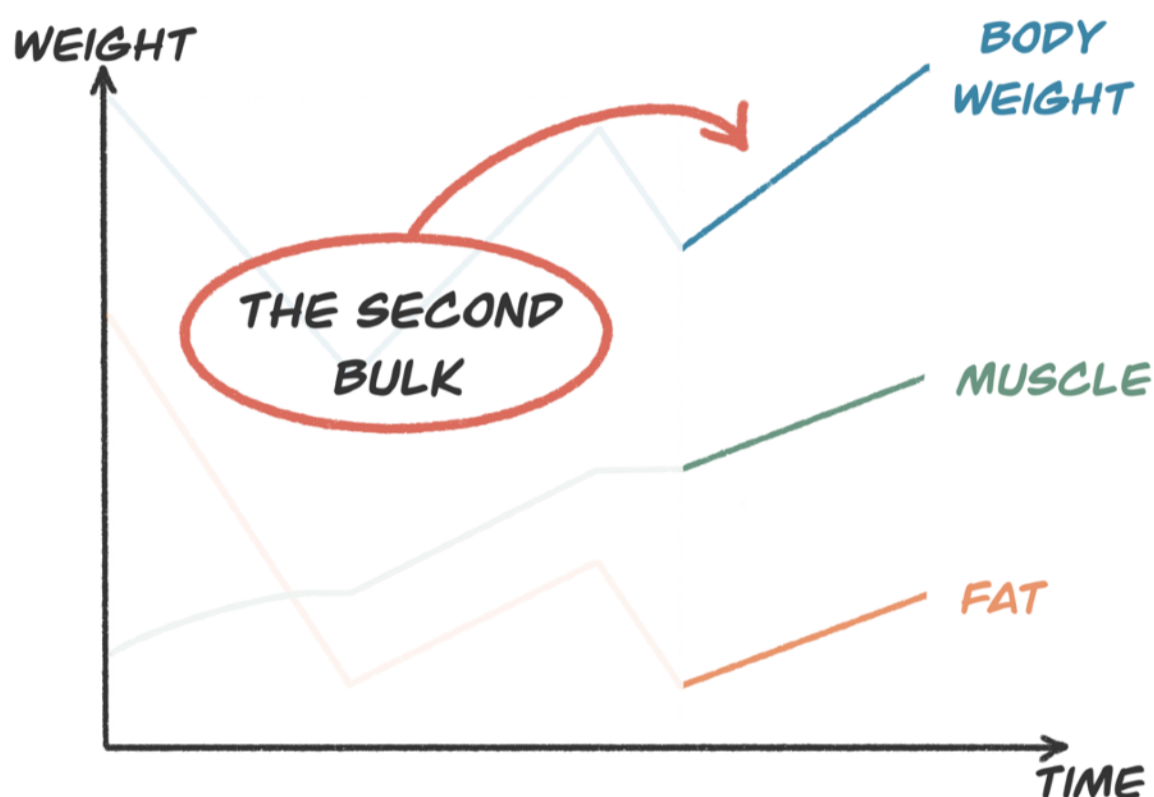
Second cut body weight, muscle, and fat mass changes.

The goal of the second cut is to take off the fat you gained during your first bulk. Don't expect to gain any muscle during this phase.

The second cut can be nerve-racking because you can never really be sure how much muscle you've gained until you've cut

back down to the same level of body fat you had before you started.

PHASE 4: THE SECOND BULK



Second bulk body weight, muscle, and fat mass changes.

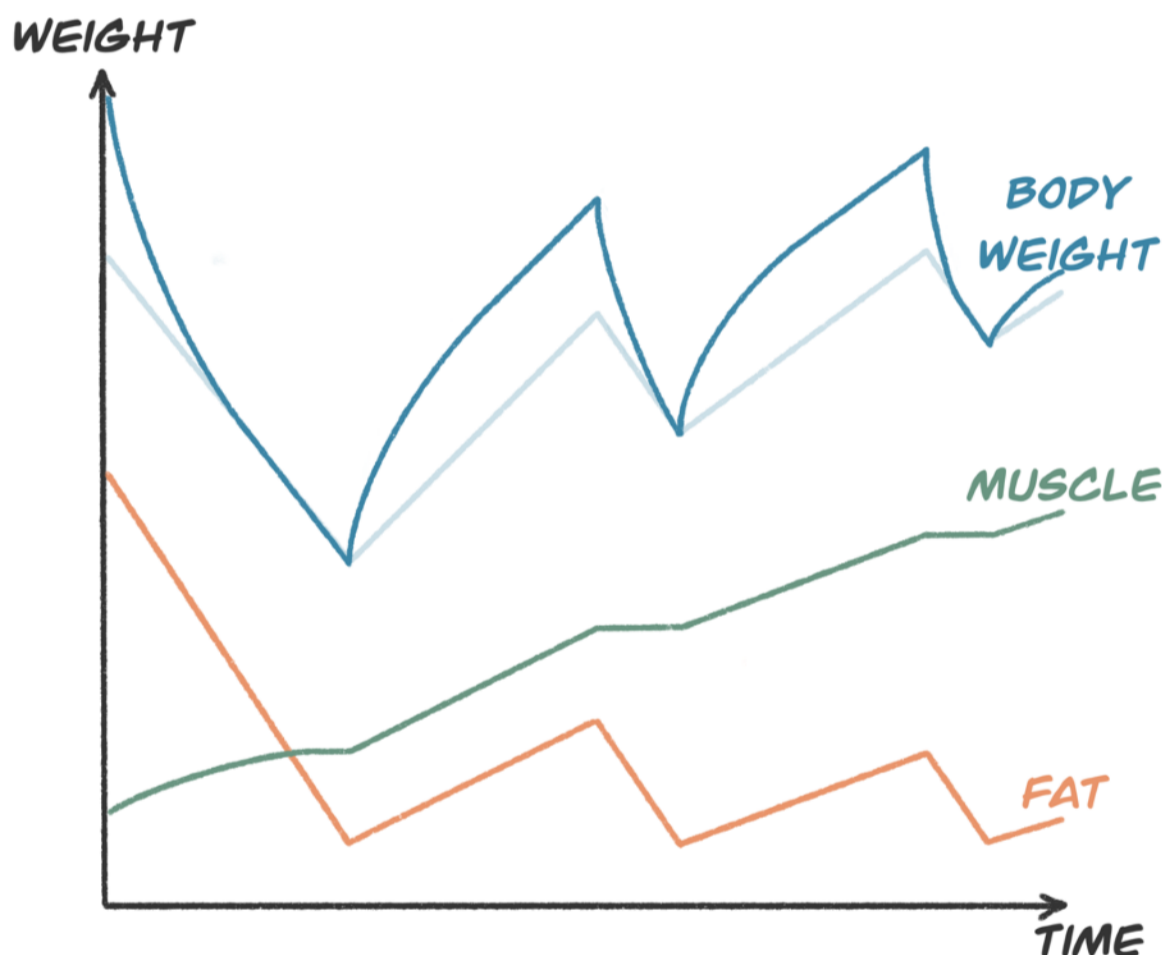
For the second bulk, you are closer to your genetic potential, so your maximal rate of muscle gain will be slower. For this reason, I recommend you target a slightly slower rate of weight gain (perhaps 0.5 pounds per month less). This is represented by shallower gradients in the sketch.

The second bulk is easier because you know what to expect, but the changes are slower, so more patience is needed.

THE REALITY OF THE BODY WEIGHT LINE

I've omitted something important up until now for the sake of simplification – your body weight will change far more than I have pictured because body weight captures more than just muscle and fat mass changes.

As you start each cutting phase, you will experience a more considerable drop in weight due to a loss of gut content, water, and *glycogen* storage. Do not confuse this with fat loss.



How bodyweight changes when water, gut content, and glycogen changes are taken into account.

(Glycogen is how we store an energy source called glucose, which comes from the carbs we eat. Every gram of carbs we consume is combined with ~3g of water when stored in the muscles and liver, waiting to be used as energy. Our muscles are ~70-80% water. A change in carbohydrate intake causes a

shift in water balance in the body. Some of the water comes under the skin, but most of it goes into the muscle.)

As you start each bulking phase, you will experience a more considerable gain in weight due to the regain of these things. Do not confuse this with fat regain.

(I'll cover this in more detail in the *Why Fluctuations in Weight and Appearance Happen* chapter.)

For this reason, the second cut can be a frustrating process because you're likely to find out that you have gained far less muscle mass than you expected. When you gain weight during the bulk, part of that weight is gut content, water, and muscle glycogen. People mistake this for muscle and think their bulk is going much better than they thought.

The reality is that you might gain 20 pounds (~9 kg) in five months of bulking, but find that just 6-7 pounds (~3 kg) are muscle. This might be 1% of your body weight per month as muscle gain, which would be quite good when compared to your initial expectations. But by this point your "realistic expectations" have long been forgotten.

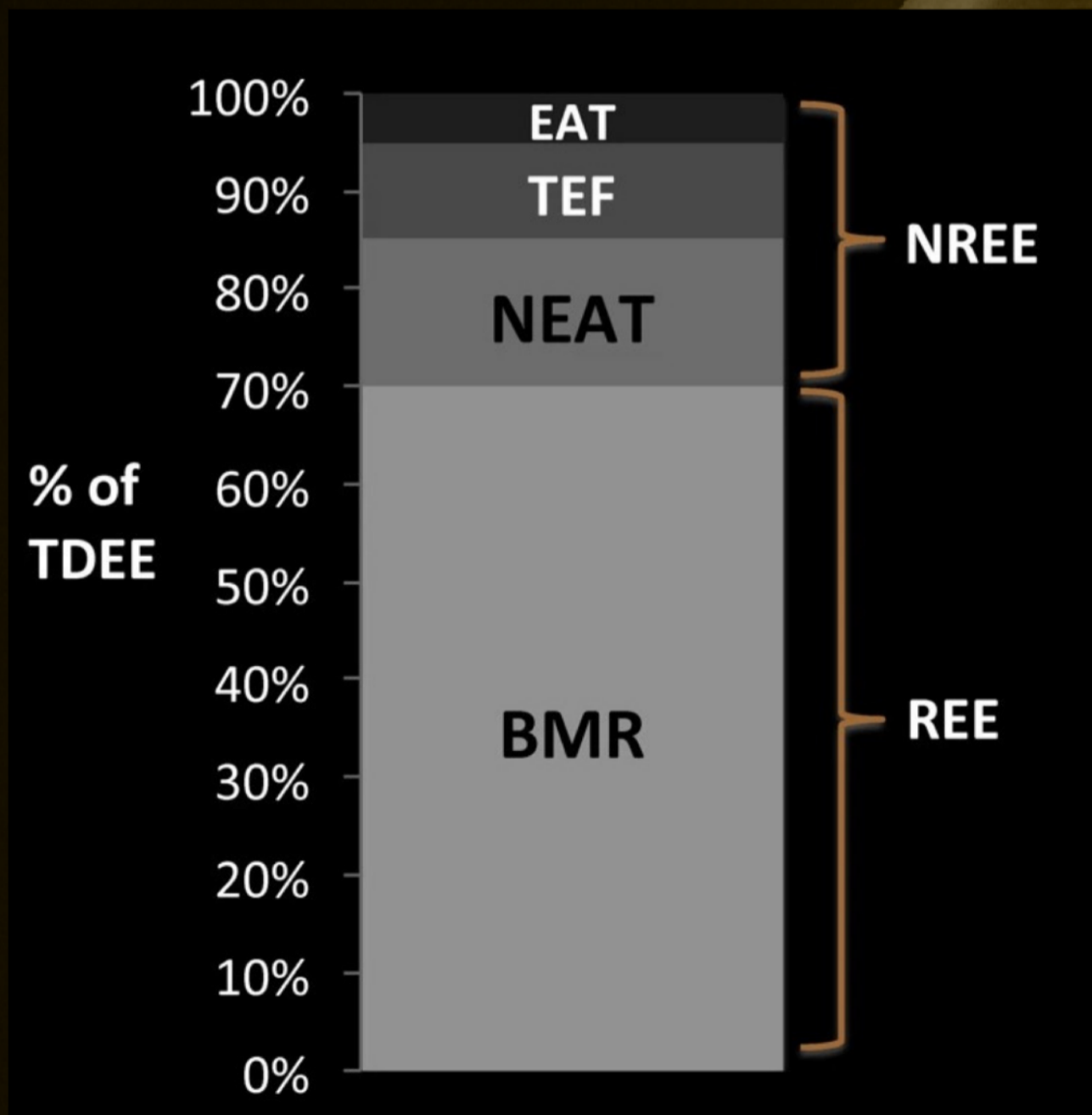
So, why am I bothering to explain all of this?

Well, we need to adjust our macros to keep us progressing through each phase. And to know how to adjust, we need to know what to expect.

But why do we have to adjust in the first place? Can't we just rely on a single calorie and macro calculation at the start of each phase?

Unfortunately not. Biology is a messy business, and there are adaptive mechanisms at play. But while this makes dieting and bulking a little more complicated, it's what keeps us alive. This is what I will explain next.

WHY ADJUSTMENTS ARE NEEDED



Our initial calorie and macro calculations are estimations, and our energy needs change over time due to various compensatory mechanisms. So, it is impossible to make a single macro calculation for cutting or bulking that will get you to your goal. Sooner or later, you will need to adjust.

These adjustments take two forms. The first is correcting any error in your initial calculation so that your weight change rate is on target. You do this once.

The second is adjusting the calorie intake up or down as your body adapts to the new calorie conditions. You will have to do this multiple times.

As we diet, we need to eat less and less to keep losing weight at the same rate. As we bulk, we need to eat more and more to keep gaining weight at the same rate. The trick is doing so in a conservative manner so that muscle mass is preserved as best we can when dieting, and fat isn't gained to an unnecessary degree when bulking.

WHY OUR INITIAL CALORIE AND MACRO CALCULATIONS ARE ONLY ESTIMATIONS

I've lost count of the number of times I have come across someone frustratedly scream into their keyboard, "But the calorie and macro calculator says I should be losing weight!!"

They have misunderstood something fundamental: my [calorie and macro calculator](#), as with any calculator, is merely a tool to help you *estimate* what your intake should be for your goals.

There are three parts of the target daily calorie intake calculation.

$$\textit{Target Daily Calorie Intake} = \textit{BMR} * \textit{Activity Multiplier} - \textit{Calorie Deficit (or + Surplus) Needed}$$

Both the BMR and activity multiplier components of this formula are estimations.

BMR can be estimated using multiple different formulas, but they are all derived from group averages.

The activity multiplier is something you choose based on how active (you think) you are, and there is a subjective component to it.

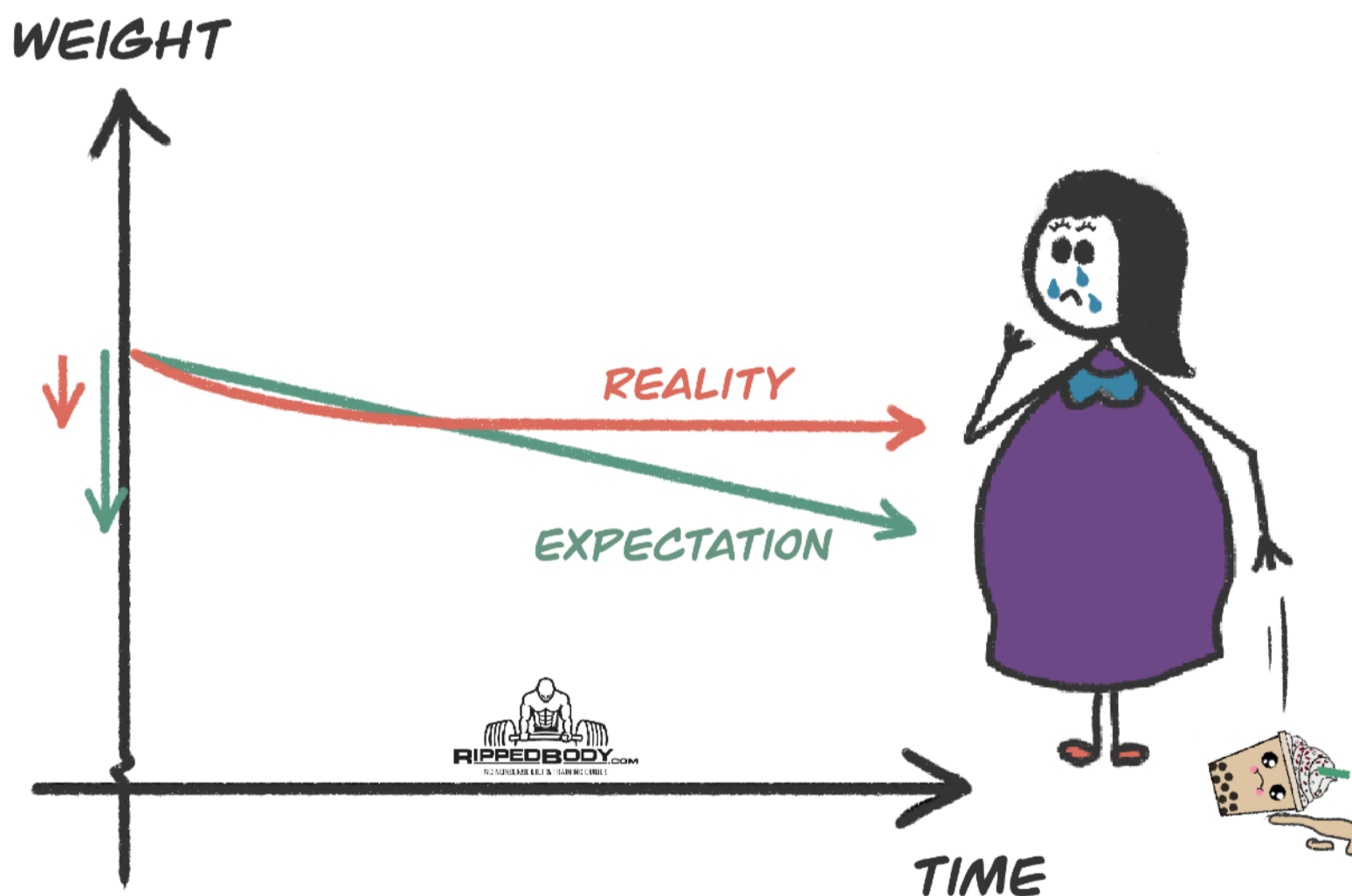
Additionally, our energy needs change over time due to various compensatory mechanisms. It is rare that someone comes to a calculator from a metabolically neutral position – they'll have been attempting to diet or bulk first, which will throw their calculation a little off also.

Therefore, after you make an initial calculation you need to wait patiently (several weeks) for the effect to become clear in our progress-tracking data. You will then adjust, if needed, based on the outcome. This is what I do with *all* clients, and [you cannot deny that it works well](#).

METABOLIC ADAPTATION

It requires a 500 calorie deficit each day to lose one pound of fat each week (1100 kcal/kg). Roughly the reverse is true for gaining muscle.

This '500 calorie rule' is often criticized because people state it without acknowledging that our energy needs change as we diet. If this weren't the case, all weight-stable Thelma would need to do is give up her daily *frappushittino*TM calorie bomb, and she would continue to lose weight.



Weight loss will gradually cease over time due to metabolic adaptation unless calorie intake is reduced further (or energy expenditure is increased).

Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. What starts as a calorie deficit is eventually eroded. The 'problem' is that energy *intake* affects energy *expenditure*. This is called *metabolic adaptation*.

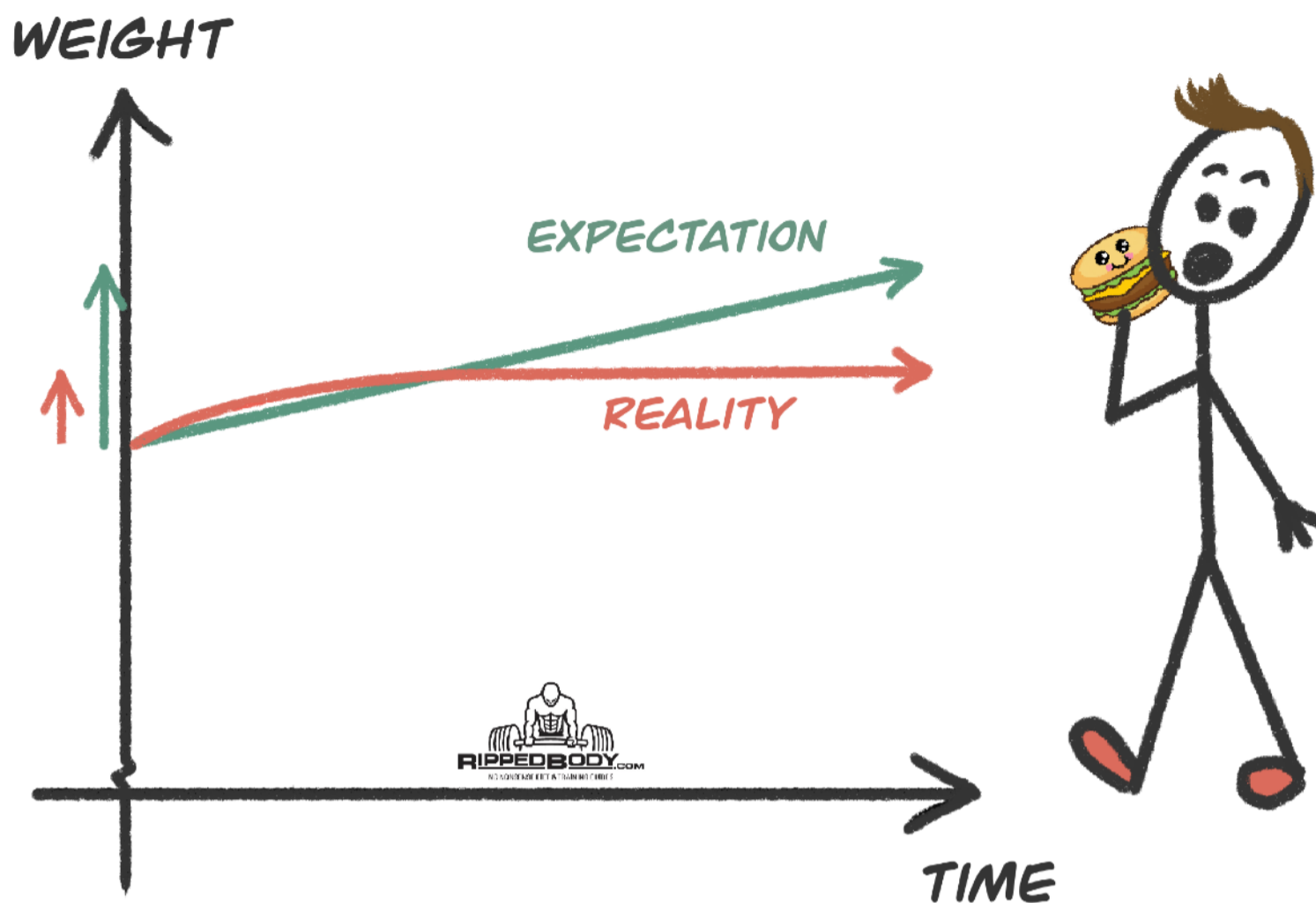
As we lose weight, our energy needs decrease by more than the lost body weight would predict when considering the decrease in metabolic costs from not having to maintain that lost tissue. This is a protective mechanism to prevent us from starving to death when food is scarce. Say, for example, you're playing an exhilarating game of hide-and-seek and get lost in the woods for weeks on end with nothing but slugs to eat.

There is a similar protective mechanism at play when we bulk.

As we gain weight, our energy needs increase by more than the gained bodyweight would predict when considering the increase in metabolic costs of maintaining the new tissue. This is there to protect us against weight gain, but it's not as strong because our survival isn't immediately threatened in the same way as food scarcity.

If it weren't for metabolic adaptation, all weight-stable Simon would have to do is eat a burger a day to put himself in a calorie surplus, and he would continue to gain weight successfully.

But the calorie surplus gets gradually eroded. Simon stops gaining weight. The internet tells him he is a hard gainer, and the algorithm starts serving him all sorts of nonsense when he just needs to eat a little more.

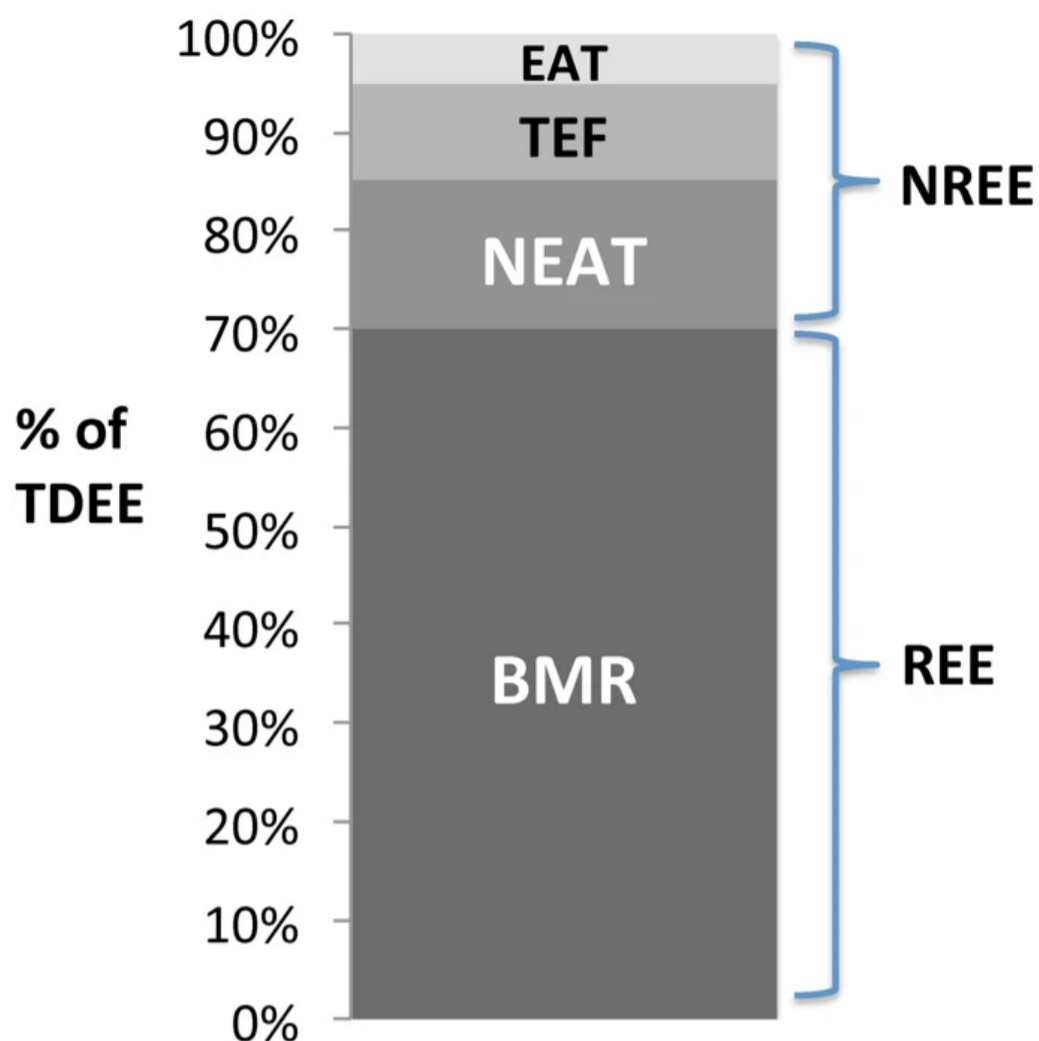


I used to be Simon. I turned to supplements, thinking they were the answer. Nope. I just needed to eat more.

As we diet, we need to eat less and less to keep losing weight at the same pace (see the red line). As we bulk, we need to eat more and more to keep gaining weight at the same rate (see the green line).

So what exactly is going on to cause this metabolic adaptation?

Well, there are a few components to it with scary-looking letters that are easy to understand if you give me a moment to explain them.



REE = resting energy expenditure; *NREE* = non-resting energy expenditure. [Image source.]

- 1. Basal metabolic rate (BMR)** makes up the largest component of our total daily energy needs. (When we attempt to measure this, we call it our resting energy expenditure.) You can think of this as the energy needs required to maintain our body's tissues and functions.

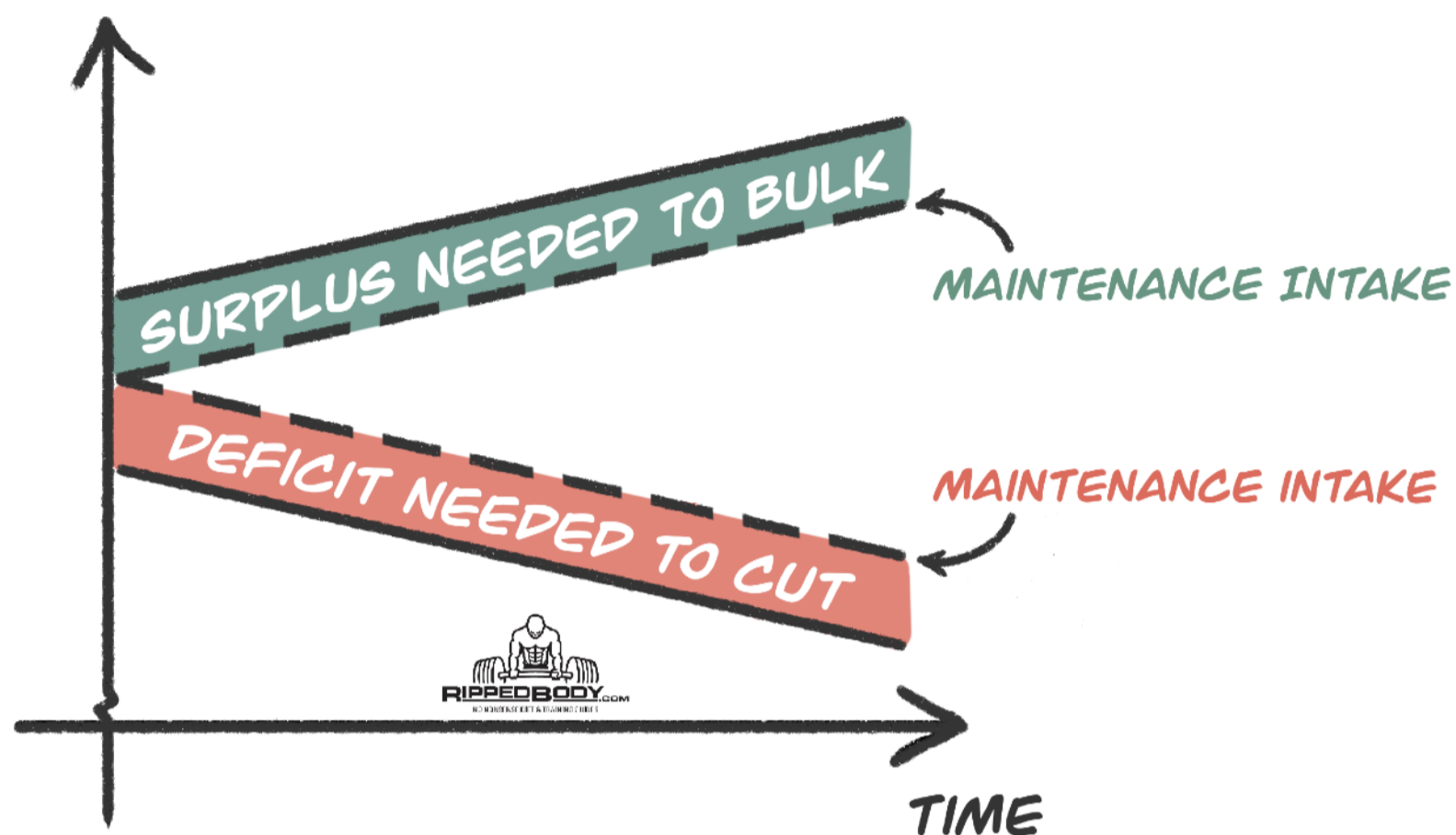
As we gain weight, our BMR rises because there is more of us to maintain. As we lose weight, our BMR drops because there is less of us to maintain. However, BMR falls further than the tissue losses alone would predict due to a compensatory mechanism called *adaptive thermogenesis*.

Thyroid hormone levels decrease, and mitochondrial efficiency increases, reducing energy expenditure.

- 2. Non-exercise activity thermogenesis (NEAT)** is the technical name for energy used during “non-exercise” movement, such as fidgeting or normal daily activities. This decreases when we diet and increases when we bulk, and both happen more for some people than others. There is nothing we can do to change this directly, but we need to be aware of it.
- 3. The thermic effect of food (TEF)** is the energy used to ingest, absorb, metabolize, and store nutrients from food. As we eat less, this decreases; as we eat more, this increases.
- 4. Exercise activity thermogenesis (EAT)** is a posh name for the energy used during exercise. The lighter we get, the less energy we expend; the heavier we get, the more energy we expend.

Because there are differences from person to person, it's impossible to calculate the level of metabolic adaptation we will have. We must track our weight over time, then adjust calorie intake to keep progressing. In general, our calorie intake will look like this over time:

CALORIE INTAKE



We have to push our calorie intake upward over time to maintain the necessary surplus for bulking; we have to decrease our calorie intake to maintain the deficit needed for cutting.

NO, YOU ARE NOT ‘METABOLICALLY DAMAGED’

One piece of nutritional charlatantry that Thelma may run into as she turns to the internet to fix her lack of weight loss is the idea that she is ‘metabolically damaged’ and therefore can’t lose weight.

This is nonsense. Don’t fall for it.

Hormonal issues requiring medication exist, but it’s unlikely that you will ever diet your way into one.

This concept of ‘metabolic damage’ was born out of frustrated people trying desperately to explain their lack of progress. I can understand why people latch onto it, but the problem is that it leaves you helpless because there is no fix for a fake condition.

Struggles to lose weight despite a low calorie intake are likely explained by one of the following things:

- 1. People think a single calculation at the start of a diet can predict progress through to the desired result.** But as I’ve just explained, this is not true.
- 2. Underestimating calorie intake and overestimating energy expenditure.** This is a common issue well documented in the scientific literature. (Even big mistakes by registered dietitians!)
- 3. Water retention and sudden whooshes are masking fat loss.** This is especially common during periods of high stress (and for women over their monthly cycle). More on this in the next chapter.

There are two other important responses to a sustained caloric deficit worth highlighting: increases in *ghrelin* and decreases in *leptin*. These two hormones are, broadly speaking, responsible for hunger and satiety.

So whenever someone says, “*Hey, I’m eating only 1200 calories, and I’m not losing weight! What am I doing wrong?!*” the chances are that they’re underestimating calorie intake, or they *are* losing fat, but they have some water retention.

It's no coincidence that this is mostly something that comes up among female dieters.

Women are, on average, shorter and lighter than men, with lower energy needs as a result. But we live in a world with large portion sizes, and so this misery is compounded. — Life is not fair, but avoiding this reality isn't the way to go.

We just have to eat less and less to keep progressing as we diet (or move more and more). At the same time, hunger increases, satiety decreases, and this sucks. This is why we need to be smart about the adjustments we make and not slash calories needlessly.

To further complicate things, two people of similar weight, height, training experience, and activity levels can have different energy needs. For this reason, *I urge you not to copy what other people do, even if they seem exactly like you.*

Some people will react with a larger than average decrease in NEAT. They will find dieting harder. It's impossible to know if you'll be one of these people in advance.

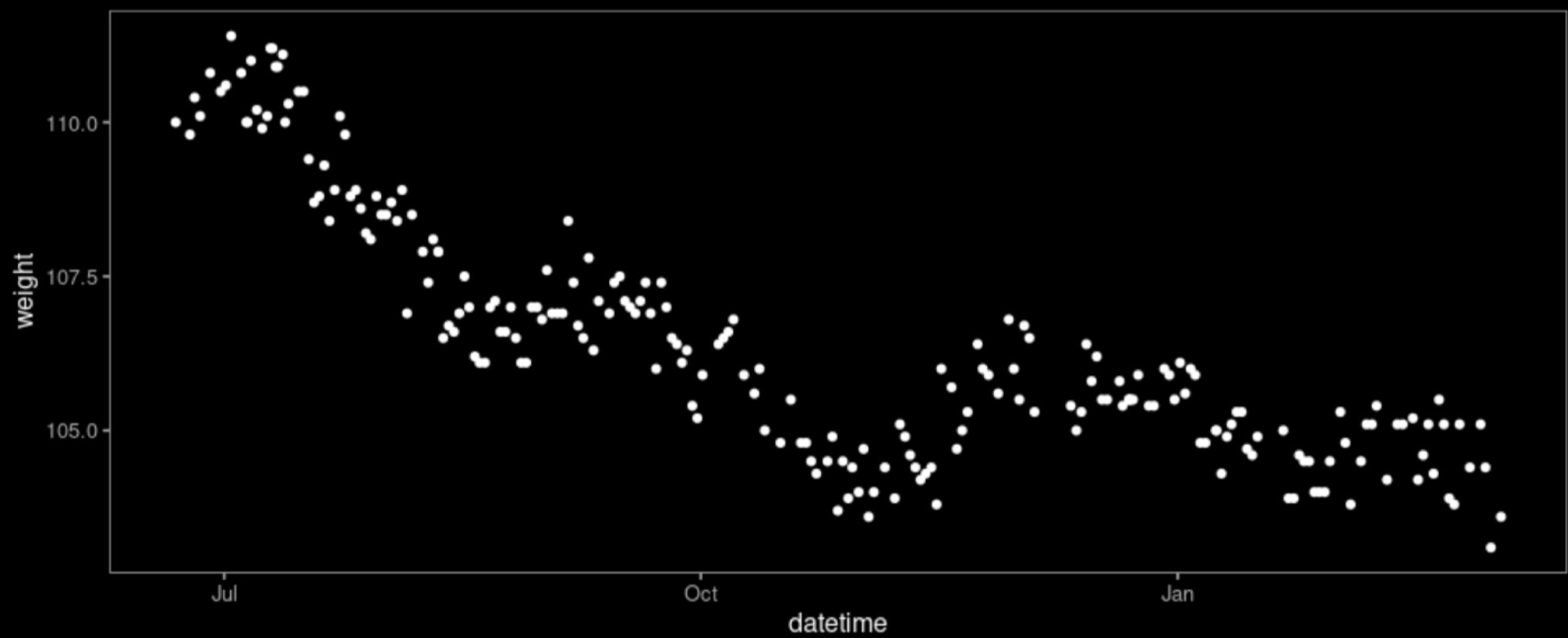
AM I A 'HARDGAINER'?

A large rise in NEAT, along with hunger-fullness signaling differences, explains why some people have a harder time gaining weight than others.

You'll see these people referred to as 'hardgainers,' but there's nothing wrong; they just have to eat more.

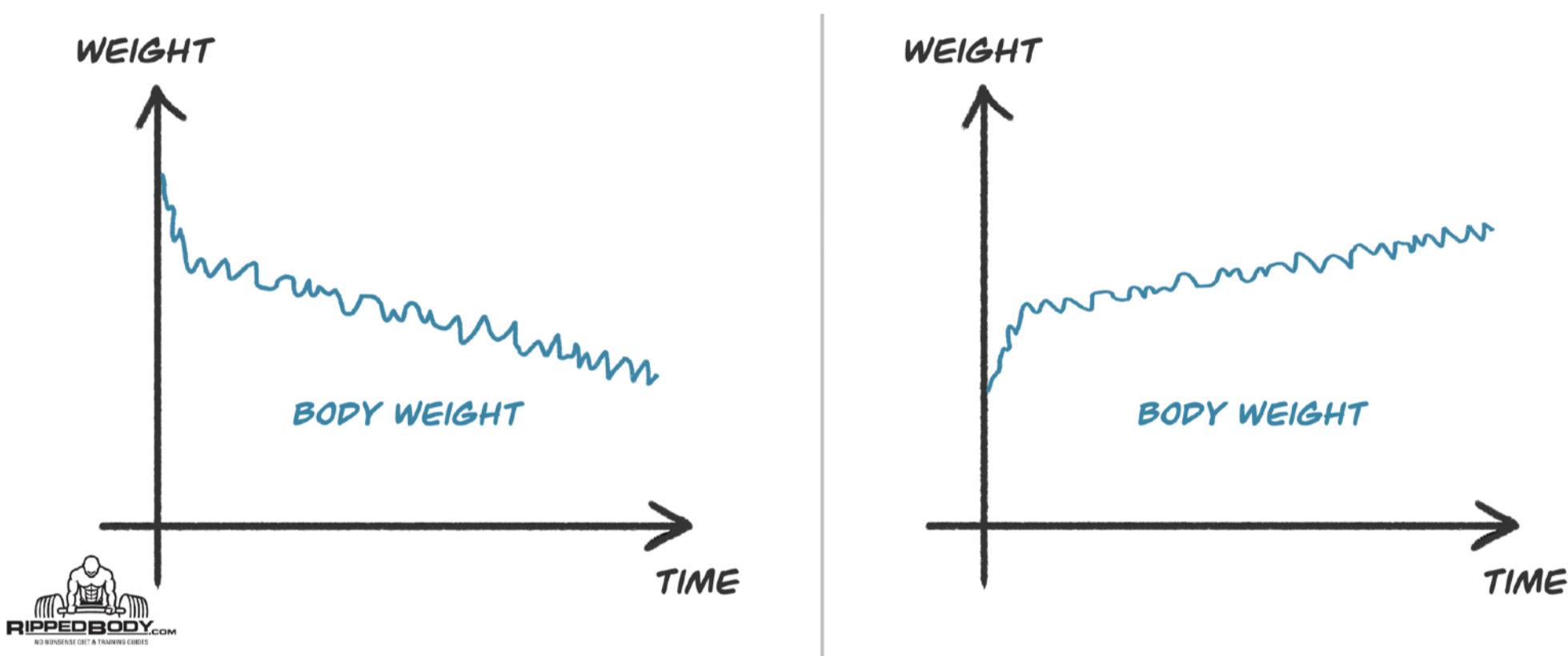
The differences in how people react to calorie deficits and surpluses mean that naturally skinny people can find an obese person's struggles to lose weight as incomprehensible as an obese person finds a skinny person's complaints about their ability to gain weight. **Try not to be too quick to judge the struggles of others.**

WHY FLUCTUATIONS IN WEIGHT AND APPEARANCE HAPPEN



Your body weight is going to fluctuate, a *lot*. These short-term fluctuations rule out any possibility of gauging progress on a day-to-day or even week-to-week basis, but attempting to do so is a mistake people often make.

Understanding the reasons for these fluctuations will help you tease out the signal from the noise.

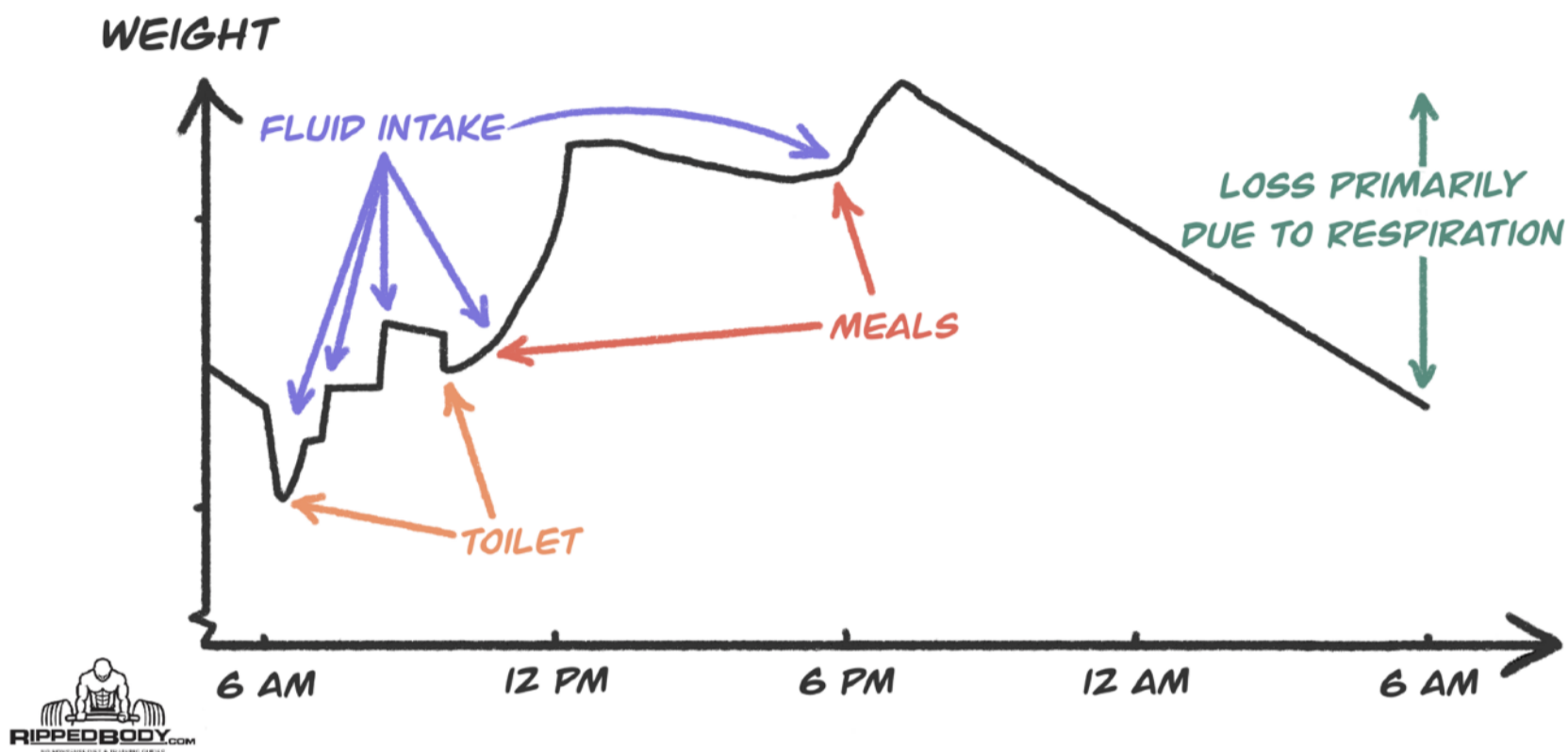


Typical weight fluctuations during a cutting phase (left) and bulking phase (right)

WEIGHT FLUCTUATIONS OVER A TYPICAL DAY

It is essential to understand that scale weight change captures much more than just fat and muscle mass changes. Your weight is also affected by hydration status, gut and bladder content, and liver and muscle glycogen storage.

Fat mass changes are slow to happen; muscle mass changes occur even more slowly. So, any large weight fluctuations you experience in a short time frame (hours or days) will not be muscle or fat.



Weight changes over a typical 24-hour period.

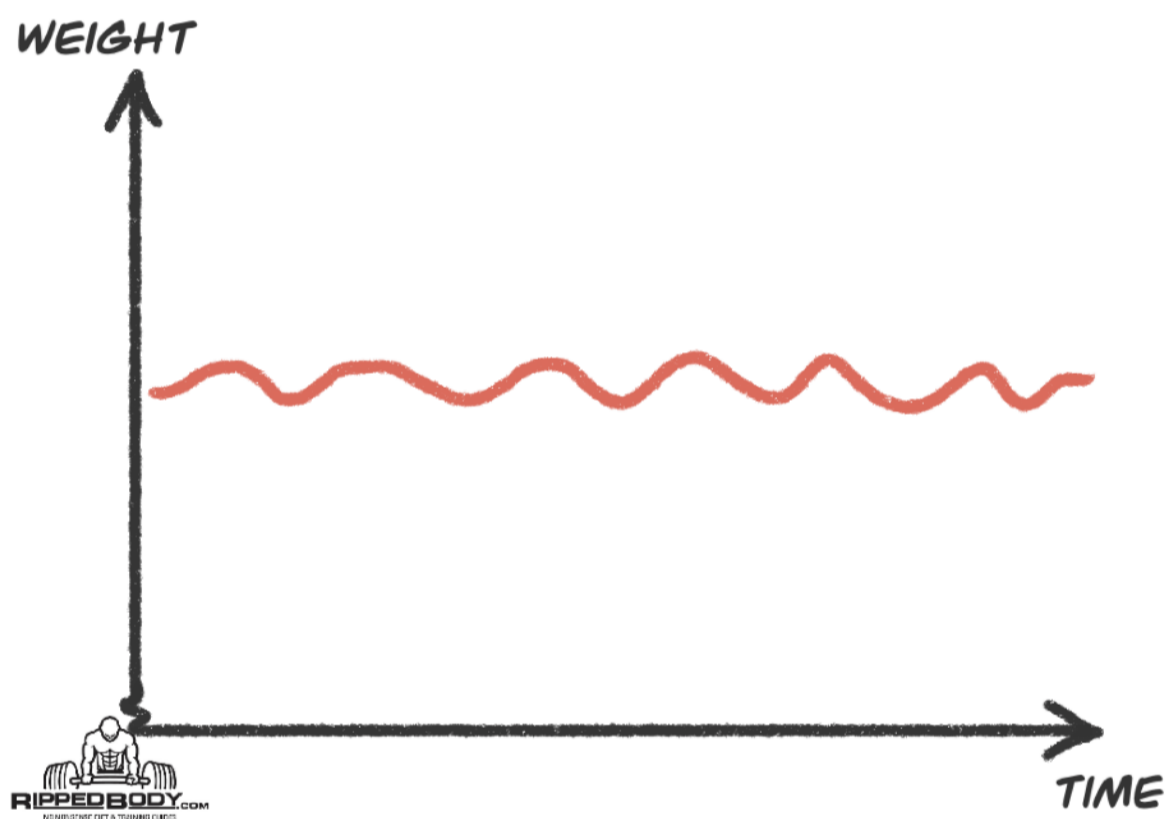
You'll have no doubt noticed that your weight fluctuates during the day. This is because of some obvious reasons, like toilet visits, water, food intake, and some less obvious ones, like sweat, and water loss through respiration at night.

You can expect to lose 1-2% body weight overnight through the moisture lost when breathing. This is why you always weigh less in the morning, and your pee is yellow for that first toilet visit — you're dehydrated.

WEIGHT FLUCTUATIONS OVER A TYPICAL WEEK

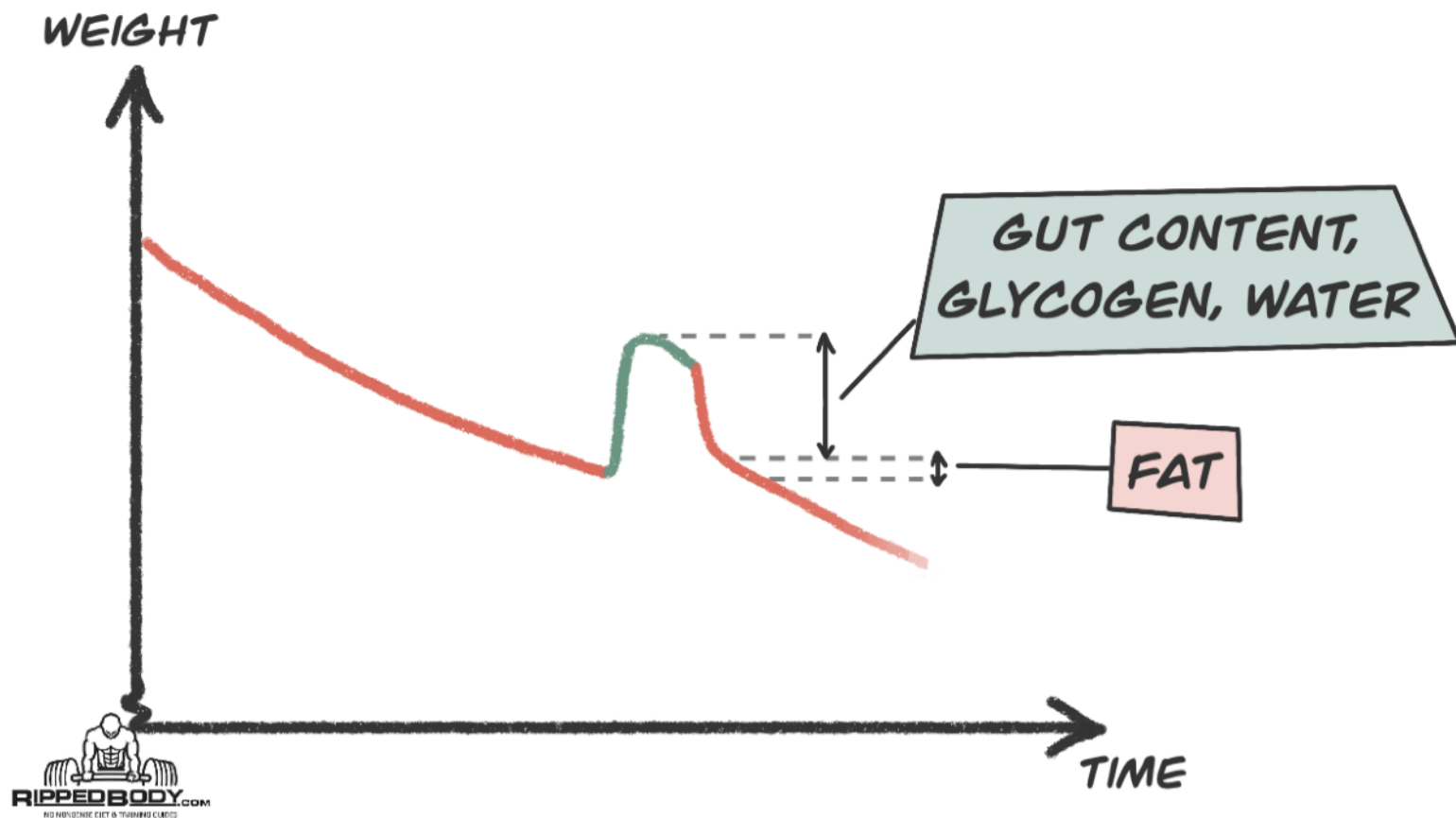
Just as you know not to weigh yourself at different times of the day and conclude whether you gained or lost any fat, you shouldn't try to gauge progress from one day to the next either.

Even when calorie balance is unchanged, if you eat saltier foods, you will retain more water for a few days. When you eat more carbs, they are stored with water as glycogen in the muscles and liver. (The opposite happens if your salt intake suddenly drops or you eat fewer carbs than usual.)



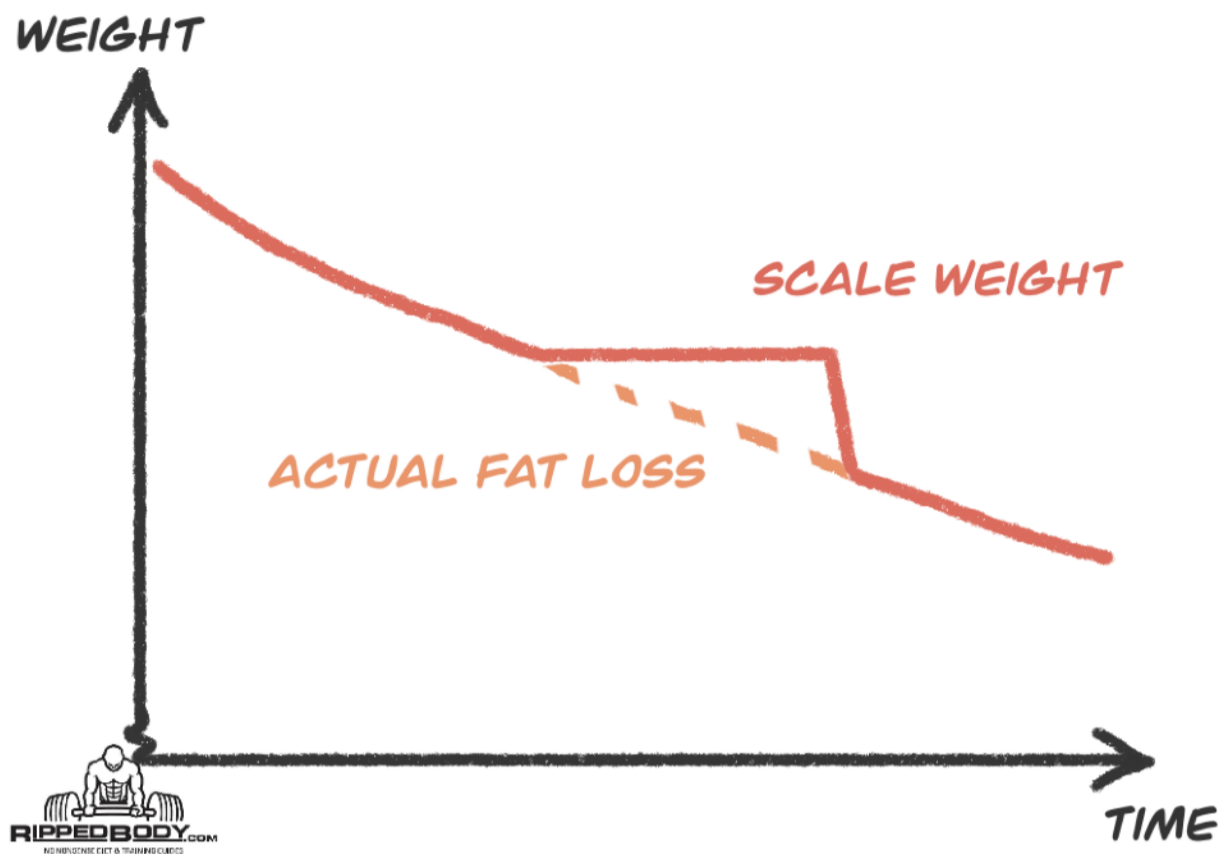
Water fluctuations over a typical week.

If you take a couple of days off your diet, unless you overeat by a lot, most of your weight gain will not be fat.



Water fluctuations after a couple of days of overeating.

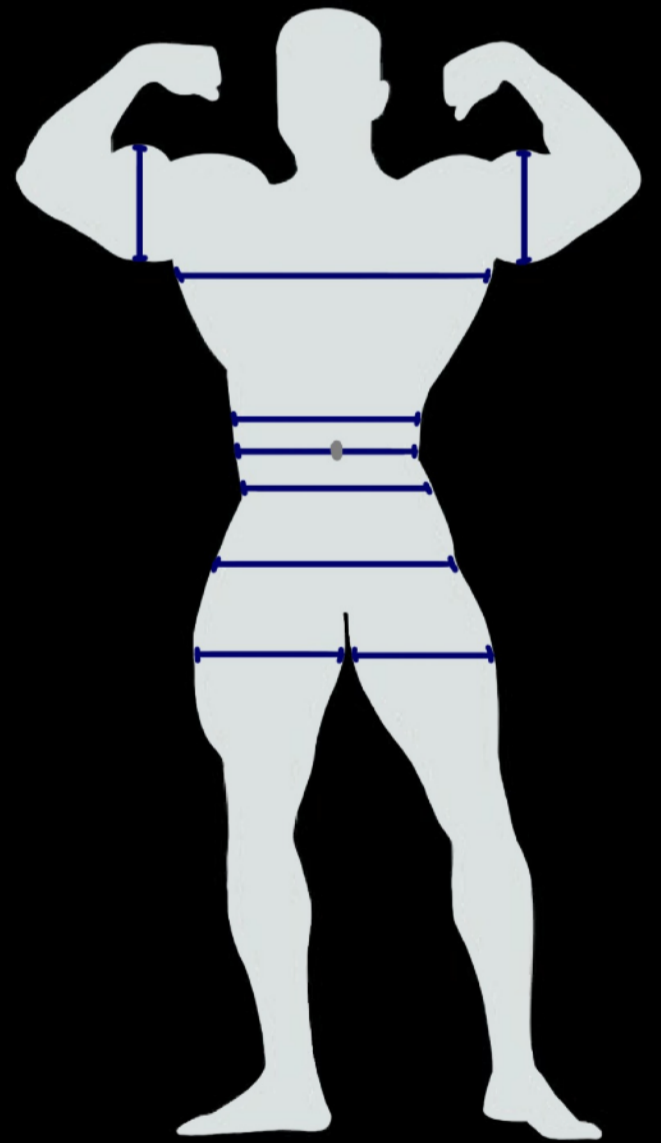
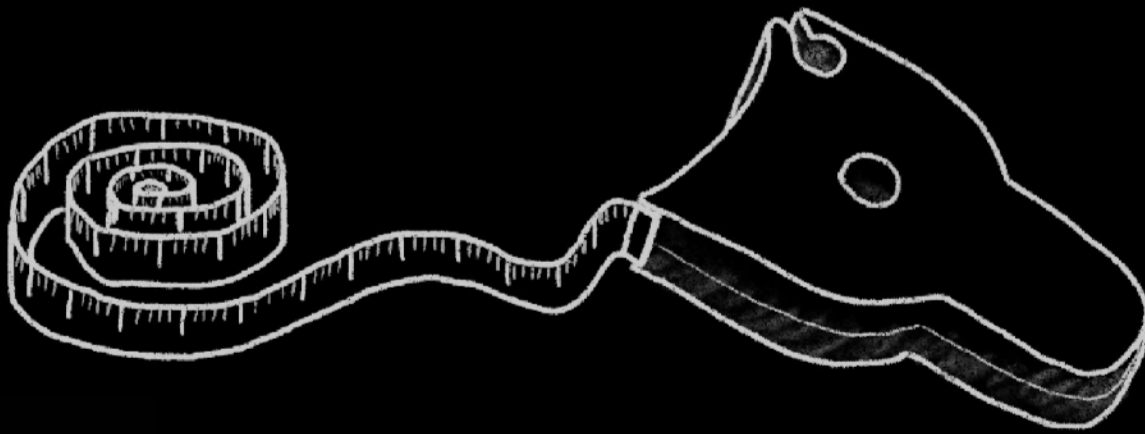
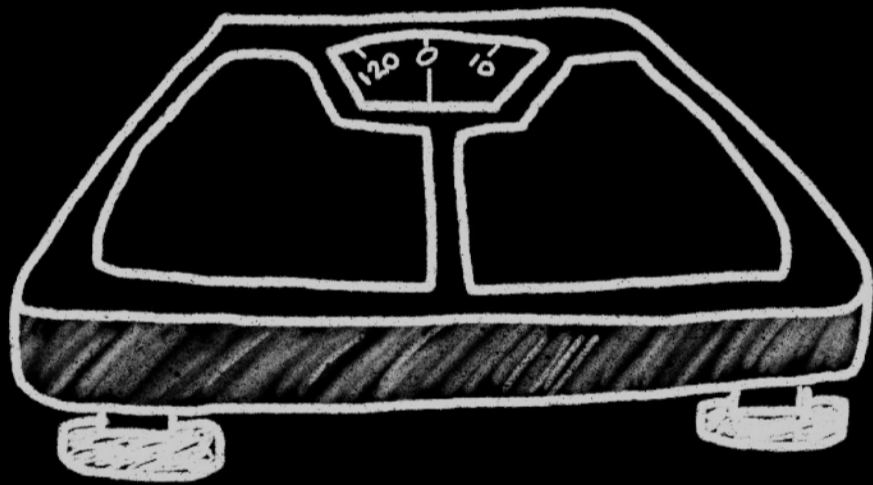
Additionally, water retention can mask fat loss also. It is common when we are stressed but it can happen at random. These fluctuations all affect your weight and how you look.



Water retention, then a 'whoosh'!

What is important is not the short-term fluctuations but the long-term trend lines. This is why the way we track our progress can make or break our diet.

HOW TO TRACK PROGRESS



Tracking progress is as much about knowing what to track as what *not* to. Taking too many data points can almost be as bad as taking too few, because you will then struggle to read the signal through the noise.

I have eight things I want you to track, and it'll take you ten minutes total each week. That's less than 3% of the time you spend training and preparing food each week, but critical to the process. So, don't neglect it!

THE THREE TRACKING METHODS TO AVOID



- 1. Don't try to track your progress by a body-fat percentage estimation tool.** All methods have inaccuracies and inconsistencies. I've talked about this [here](#), [here](#), and [interviewed one of the world's foremost experts about it](#).

- 2. Do not try to use an activity tracker to estimate your calorie burn and adjust your diet each day to the numbers it gives.** These devices are also notoriously inaccurate. The activity multiplier in your TDEE calculation took care of your activity levels. Yes, they will vary a little from day to day, but this is a small part of a much bigger picture, so you don't need to worry about it.

- 3. Do not try to gauge progress by how you look in the mirror.** The brain plays tricks on us. How we see ourselves changes due to a phenomenon known as *perceptual adaptation*. Oh, and how defined we look can change from day to day also.

THE 8 WAYS I GET CLIENTS TO TRACK PROGRESS

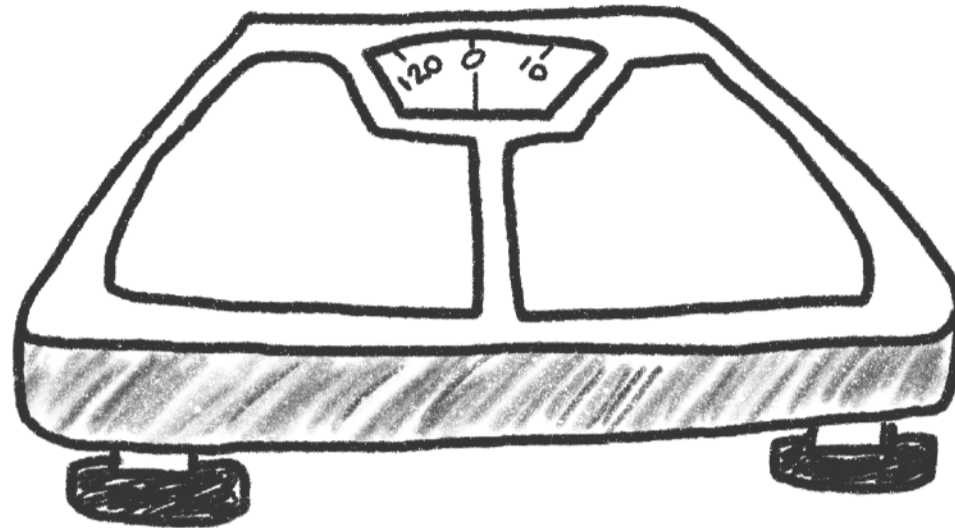
There are eight key ways I now get clients to track progress. The data points taken together will help you navigate the fluctuations in weight and determine whether you need to adjust or just keep doing what you're doing.

	Example Data	January 1st
Weight	190.1	
Chest	99.1	
R arm	39.2	
L arm	39.2	
2" above	84.9	
Belly	88.1	
2" below	84.6	
Hips*	90.3	
R thigh	64.4	
L thigh	63.1	
Target weight change	-1.0-1.25 lbs/wk	
Other Activity	-	
Meal Times	12:00, 20:00	
Training Time	06:00	
4x Training Day Macros	P:180 C:230 F:45	
3x Rest Day Macros	P:180 C:75 F:75	
Calorie Total Adherence	110%	
Training Adherence	100%	
Sleep issues? (0-5)	1	
Stress issues? (0-5)	0	
Hunger issues? (0-5)	2	
Fatigue/lethargy? (0-5)	1	
"Key Lift" Notes:		
Squat	Progressing, recovered.	
Deadlift	Progress slowing, recovered.	
Bench Press	Not progressing, recovered.	
Rows	Not progressing, not recovering.	
Overhead Press	Progressing, recovered.	

[Download a copy of my tracking spreadsheet here.](#)

1. WEIGH YOURSELF DAILY

Weigh yourself every morning, upon waking, after going to the toilet. Note the weekly average.



You can choose to do this at night, but most people will find a morning habit easier to stay consistent with.

Put the scale, notepad, and pen next to the toilet so you can't forget. Note each day to the nearest 0.1 and note the weekly average to the nearest 0.1 in your progress tracker.

	Example Data	Week 0	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Weight	190.1	161.2	160	158.9	158.2	156.7	155	153.8
Chest	99.1	109	108.5	108.5	108.9	108.8	108.4	108.5
R arm	39.2	38.9	38	37.8	37.8	37.6	37.8	37.5
L arm	39.2	38.3	38	37.7	38	37.7	38	37.7
2" above	84.9	83.7	81.6	81	80	79.5	78.2	77.7
Belly	88.1	84.4	82.7	82.5	82.1	81	80.1	79.6
2" below	84.6	85.7	84.1	84.1	83	82.1	81	80.7
Hips*	90.3	95.1	92.6	92.6	91.6	90.9	90.5	90
R thigh	64.4	58.1	58	58.3	58	57.6	57.6	57.4
L thigh	63.1	57	56.2	56.5	57.3	57.1	56.9	56.7

WHY I RECOMMEND DAILY WEIGHING

As explained in the previous chapter, your weight will fluctuate. Weighing ourselves daily, noting the average at the end of each week, and then comparing weeks helps to smooth out these fluctuations in the data and make interpretation easier.

As a reminder, here are all the reasons that weight fluctuations happen, aside from fat and muscle mass changes:

- ▶ Water due to hydration status (perspiration and respiration).
- ▶ Water due to a change in salt intake.
- ▶ Water (retention) due to stress or the menstrual cycle.
- ▶ Glycogen due to a change in carb intake.
- ▶ Bowel content, because some foods have a higher 'gut residue' (they stay in the gut for longer).

Some clients have found daily weighing stressful due to the fluctuations. But I've found that when I've taken the time to explain the causes and show them several data sets of past clients, it has helped immensely.

So, if you find the idea of daily weighing stressful, the reasons presented here and the data you'll see later in the book should help.

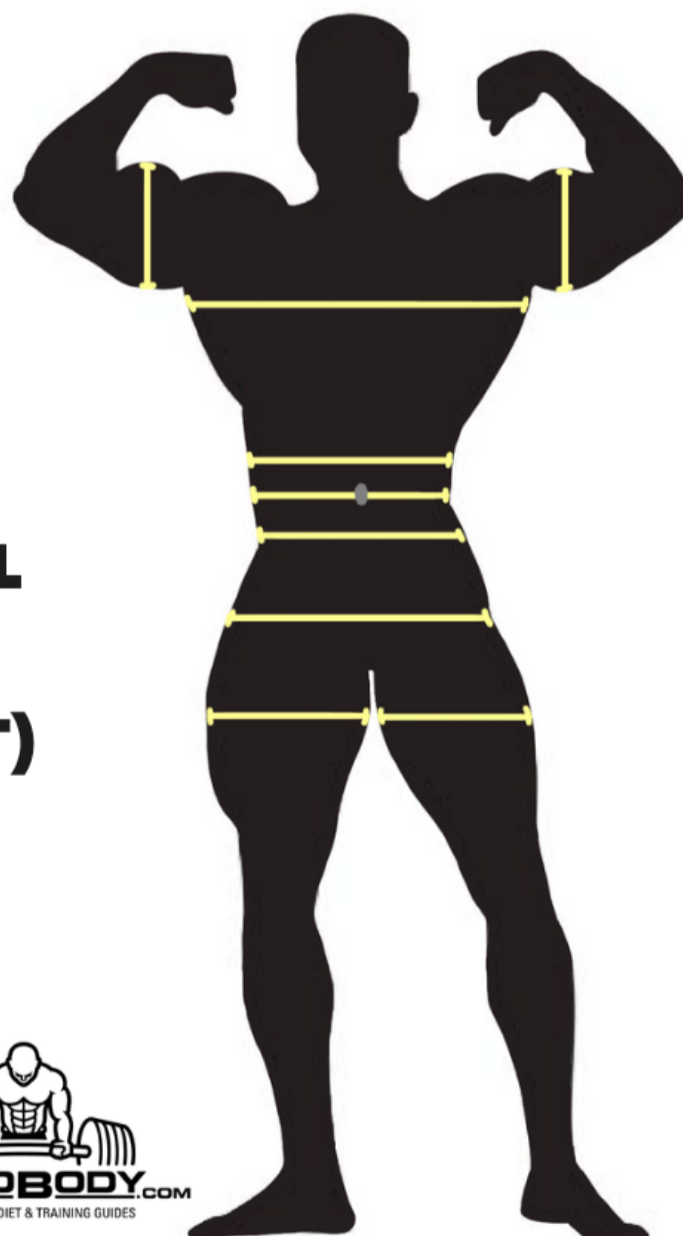
2. TAKE WEEKLY BODY MEASUREMENTS

Measure your body circumference in nine places, once per week, to the nearest 0.1 cm.

I suggest you measure in the morning when you wake up, after going to the toilet. I get clients to do this on a Saturday.

HOW TO MEASURE YOUR PROGRESS

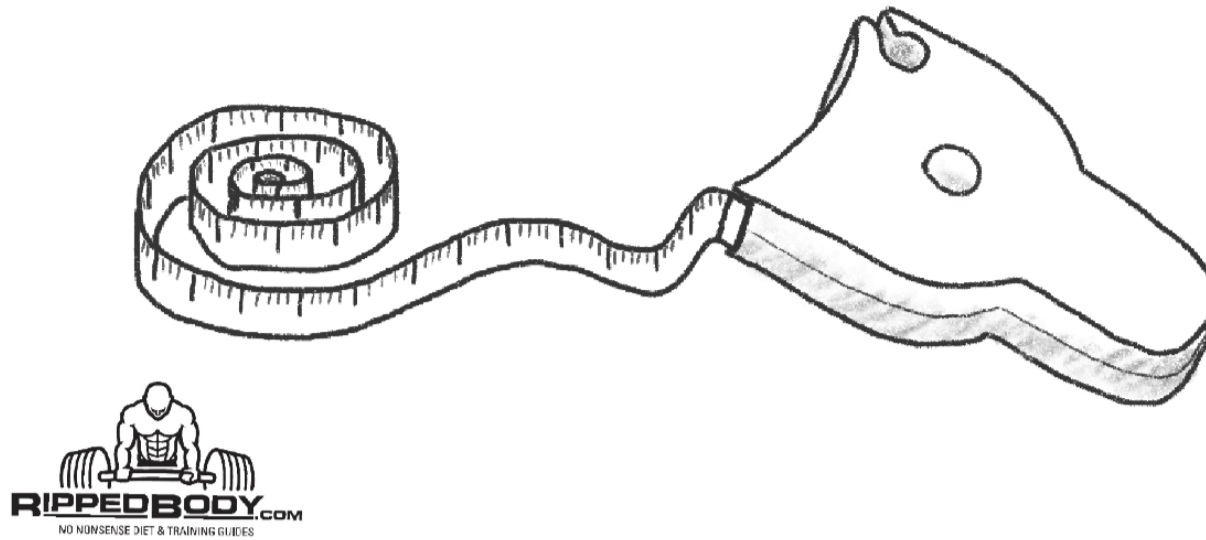
- 1. CHEST**
- 2. RIGHT ARM**
- 3. LEFT ARM**
- 4. 2" ABOVE NAVEL**
- 5. STOMACH AT NAVEL**
- 6. 2" BELOW NAVEL**
- 7. HIPS (WIDEST POINT)**
- 8. RIGHT LEG**
- 9. LEFT LEG**



	Example Data	Week 0	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Weight	190.1	161.2	160	158.9	158.2	156.7	155	153.8
Chest	99.1	109	108.5	108.5	108.9	108.8	108.4	108.5
R arm	39.2	38.9	38	37.8	37.8	37.6	37.8	37.5
L arm	39.2	38.3	38	37.7	38	37.7	38	37.7
2" above	84.9	83.7	81.6	81	80	79.5	78.2	77.7
Belly	88.1	84.4	82.7	82.5	82.1	81	80.1	79.6
2" below	84.6	85.7	84.1	84.1	83	82.1	81	80.7
Hips*	90.3	95.1	92.6	92.6	91.6	90.9	90.5	90
R thigh	64.4	58.1	58	58.3	58	57.6	57.6	57.4
L thigh	63.1	57	56.2	56.5	57.3	57.1	56.9	56.7

To help you get consistent measurements:

- ▶ **Do it yourself** rather than relying on a partner, as you are the only person that will always be with you.
- ▶ **Get an automatically tightening tape** (commonly branded as an Orbitape or Myotape). This will make self-measuring easier, and the tightness of the tape will be consistent.
- ▶ **For the chest**, measure at the nipple-line, being sure not to get the tape at an angle or twisted behind your back. Take a deep breath and hold it. Don't flex your lats or chest unless you have experience controlling how much you can make the lats flare.
- ▶ **For the legs**, stand, tense, and measure at the widest point.
- ▶ **For the arms**, curl your biceps and tense at the widest point.
- ▶ **For the stomach**, tense and measure at the navel, three finger-widths above, and three finger-widths below.



The Myotape / Orbitape looks. [Here's my video guide to using it.](#)

WHY I RECOMMEND TAKING WEEKLY BODY MEASUREMENTS

When combined with the scale weight, body measurements help us to gauge muscle growth and fat loss in different areas.

The 0.1 cm degree of accuracy is useful for noting small changes and trends in the data. It also sets clients up with a mindset on precision, reminding them that they need to take the data seriously. Without reliable data, as an online coach, I am blind. You will be also.

3. TAKE MONTHLY PHOTOS

Take two photos, front and side, once every four weeks.



Use the same lighting conditions, camera, camera angle, time of day, and pose. Do this yourself rather than relying on someone to take them.

Resist the urge to forcibly stick your stomach out in your first set of photos. The goal with the photos is not to have the most striking before-after shots but to have a reliable visual gauge of progress.

WHY I RECOMMEND TAKING PHOTOS

Being able to see changes in definition month to month can be very useful for motivation. I've experimented with weekly and fortnightly photos with clients, and I'm convinced that every four weeks is best as the changes are often too small to be noticeable at higher frequencies.

Competitors should consider adding a third picture from the back, as this can show changes in the lower back, hip, and ass fat which the front and side photos will not towards the end of the diet.

I prefer relying on data for decision-making purposes, but there are three exceptions that come to mind where I find photos to be more useful:

1. When I make a guess at initial body fat.
2. When I gauge whether a competitor is lean enough.
3. When I help people decide when to transition from a cut to a bulk.

4. RATE WEEKLY DIETARY ADHERENCE

Note the adherence to your weekly calorie target as a percentage of your totals for the week.

So, if you go 15% over your calorie targets, write 115%. If you go 10% under your targets, write 90%.

Training Time	5am, 2pm					
Training Day Macros	5	P:160 C:190 F:50				
Rest Day Macros	2	P:180 C:100 F:65				
Calorie Total Adherence	110%		105%	103%	98%	100%
Training Adherence	100%		100%	100%	100%	100%
Sleep issues? (0-5)	1		1	1	1	1
Stress issues? (0-5)	0		0	0	0	0
Hunger issues? (0-5)	2		0	1	2	1
Fatigue/lethargy? (0-5)	1		2	1	1	1

The way to find your daily calorie targets is to multiply the calorie values of each macronutrient and then add them together.

For protein and carbs, this is 4 calories per gram, for fats, this is 9 calories per gram. Thus, if your macros are P:200, C:200, F:50, your calorie target is 2050 daily, 14,350 weekly.

▶ If you eat 16,000 kcal, your adherence total is 111%.

$$(16000/14350*100)$$

▶ If you eat 12,000, your adherence total is 84%.

$$(12000/14350*100)$$

WHY I RECOMMEND LOGGING DIETARY ADHERENCE AS A PERCENTAGE OF CALORIE TOTALS

You aren't going to be perfect. Your memory is fallible and has a recency bias.

When looking at your data to determine whether your macros need to be adjusted, you need to know how well you adhered each week.

Your macro targets might be perfectly fine, but the issue is that you haven't been adhering to them, and without the data it's easy to forget.

Also, by tracking things as a percentage of calorie totals hit each week, you get the opportunity to compensate for any mistakes made earlier in the week on later days. You don't want to do this too often, or you will compromise recovery.

Don't make the mistake of writing the percentage of meals you adhered to.

Let's say you eat three meals per day and have two meals off plan in a week, calling them "free meals." This would give you a 90% meal adherence total, which on the face of it, could be considered good adherence.

However, it's conceivable that with a starter, large main course, and dessert, you could put down 2500 calories in each of these meals.

▶ Assuming a 2100 calorie daily target and perfect adherence to your otherwise 700 calorie meals, this would give you a 3600 kcal surplus for the week, which is an adherence total of 124%.

$$(2100*7 + 3600)/2100*7$$

This would wipe out your calorie deficit entirely, but if you were to log 90% instead of 124%, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the lack of progress wasn't due to poor adherence but the macros being too high.

If you cut macros, adherence is harder. If you manage to sustain it, you're likely to then consume even more in your two *free meals* (typically at the weekend), and the cycle of misery will continue.

5. RATE WEEKLY TRAINING ADHERENCE

Note your training adherence as a percentage of workouts completed.

So, if you have four workouts planned for the week and you only did three of them, rate your adherence as 75%.

Training Time	5am, 2pm					
Training Day Macros	5	P:160 C:190 F:50				
Rest Day Macros	2	P:180 C:100 F:65				
Calorie Total Adherence	110%		105%	103%	98%	100%
Training Adherence	100%		100%	100%	100%	100%
Sleep issues? (0-5)	1		1	1	1	1
Stress issues? (0-5)	0		0	0	0	0
Hunger issues? (0-5)	2		0	1	2	1
Fatigue/lethargy? (0-5)	1		2	1	1	1

Fluctuations in performance are normal and to be expected. This percentage is not a reflection of how well you feel you performed or whether you progressed, only whether you turned up and put in the work.

WHY I RECOMMEND RATING WEEKLY TRAINING ADHERENCE

If you haven't been sticking to your training plan, then you can't expect to progress with it. However, without the data it's sometimes easy to miss the fact that you haven't been faithfully following the program well enough to gauge the efficacy.

If this number is consistently below ~85% (meaning you're missing one in six sessions), then you need to re-prioritize

training in your schedule. If that is not possible, [re-organize the training volume into fewer training days](#).

Yes, this will mean longer, more tiring sessions with a potential performance drop off toward the end. But this is preferable to consistently missing workouts.

6. RATE SLEEP QUALITY, STRESS, HUNGER, AND FATIGUE

Rate all of these on a 0–5 scale.

- ▶ **Sleep issues?** (0 = no issues, high-quality sleep. 5 = insomnia.)
- ▶ **Stress levels** (0 = no stress, 5 = divorce or a death in the family.)
- ▶ **Hunger issues?** (0 = no issues, 5 = extreme hunger.)
- ▶ **Fatigue/lethargy?** (0 = no issues, 5 = exceptionally fatigued.)

Training Time	5am, 2pm					
Training Day Macros	5	P:160 C:190 F:50				
Rest Day Macros	2	P:180 C:100 F:65				
Calorie Total Adherence	110%		105%	103%	98%	100%
Training Adherence	100%		100%	100%	100%	100%
Sleep issues? (0-5)	1		1	1	1	1
Stress issues? (0-5)	0		0	0	0	0
Hunger issues? (0-5)	2		0	1	2	1
Fatigue/lethargy? (0-5)	1		2	1	1	1

WHY I RECOMMEND TRACKING SUBJECTIVE FEELINGS OF SLEEP QUALITY, STRESS, HUNGER, AND FATIGUE

It’s normal to have some issues as you progress. Knowing about these things will help tell you when you can be more aggressive or when you need to back off a little.

- ▶ **Sleep quality** will affect training performance and recovery, and therefore muscle retention when in a calorie deficit. Sleep quality affects hunger and energy levels. So, if

you are hungry, your training has been shitty recently, or you've been feeling lethargic, but you see that your sleep quality has been low, fixing it is the most likely cure.

- ▶ **Stress** will negatively impact training performance as well as recovery and can cause water retention. Stress can also affect sleep. So, if your weight hasn't been coming down in the last few weeks, but your stress levels are exceptionally high, then water retention masking fat losses may be to blame.
- ▶ **Chronic hunger** can signify that the caloric deficit is too high. However, high-stress levels or poor food choices can sometimes cause this. So, if you are hungry and stressed, the one may be causing the other, and you need to work on the root cause of the stress.
- ▶ **Energy levels** affect workout performance. This, in turn, affects our ability to maintain muscle when dieting or grow it when bulking. If energy levels are low, it could be a sign that you need to raise caloric intake. However, it could also be due to poor sleep or high stress, so consider these things before increasing calorie intake.

As you can see, there are many interactions to consider. I'll simplify the decision-making process with the flowcharts in the later chapters on mid-diet adjustments.

7. KEEP SUMMARY NOTES ON YOUR KEY LIFTS

List each of the main compound lifts in your training plan in the 'Key Lift' section beneath the rest of the data. Every two weeks, write one of the following three things:

- ▶ 'Progressing, recovered.'
- ▶ 'Not progressing, recovered.'
- ▶ 'Not progressing, not recovered.'

'Not recovered' in this sense means your performance is affected after a warm-up (the weights feel heavier than usual for that exercise). This shouldn't be considered good or bad, so don't attach a meaning to it. It is normal for this to happen in waves across our training week(s) as fatigue builds and dissipates with training the training cycle and as stresses come and go.

WHY I RECOMMEND YOU KEEP SUMMARY NOTES ABOUT TRAINING PROGRESSION

Keeping summary data will help you to see the connections between macro adjustments, sleep, stress, hunger, and fatigue, without being overwhelmed by the full training log.

Suppose you see that you aren't progressing as well as expected in certain areas, despite sleep, stress, and adherence being on point for a couple of consecutive periods. In that case, you know

you need to take a deload, tweak something in your training program, or perhaps raise your caloric intake.

If you are not progressing but feeling recovered, it could be a sign you need to increase training volume.

Training adjustments are out of the scope of this book. Please refer to [the training articles on the site](#), or [The Muscle and Strength Pyramid: Training](#).

8. KEEP A DETAILED TRAINING LOG

Either in a notebook or a separate tab of your tracking spreadsheet, keep a full training log. Note the **sets * reps * load** (including the weight of the bar).

For example, if you performed 3 sets of 12 reps at 35 kg, write **3*12*35**. Here is an example:

Day 1				
	Exercise	Sets*reps @RPE	Week 1	Week 2
	BB Back Squat	4*7-9 @7	4*9*225	4*9*245
	BB RDL	3*4-6 @8	3*6*225	3*6*245
	Leg Extensions	3*10-12 @8	3*12*35	2*12*40, 10*40
	Leg Curls	3*10-12 @8	3*12*25	3*12*30
Day 2				
	Exercise	Sets*reps @RPE	Week 1	Week 2
	Chin-ups	3*7-9 @8	3*7*265	3*7*270
	DB OHP	3*7-9 @8	3*9*45	3*9*50
	BB Bench Press	4*7-9 @7	4*9*185	4*9*195
	Seated Cable Rows	4*7-9 @7	4*9*11	4*9*13
	Cable Bicep Curls	2*10-12 @9	2*12*40	2*12*50
	Cable Press Downs	2*10-12 @9	2*12*50	2*12*70

If you lower the load or do fewer reps on subsequent sets, note it like this: **2*12*40, 12*35**, or **2*12*40, 10*40**.

Avoid clutter, don't note your warm-up sets nor the units.

WHY I RECOMMEND YOU KEEP A TRAINING LOG

There are two primary reasons:

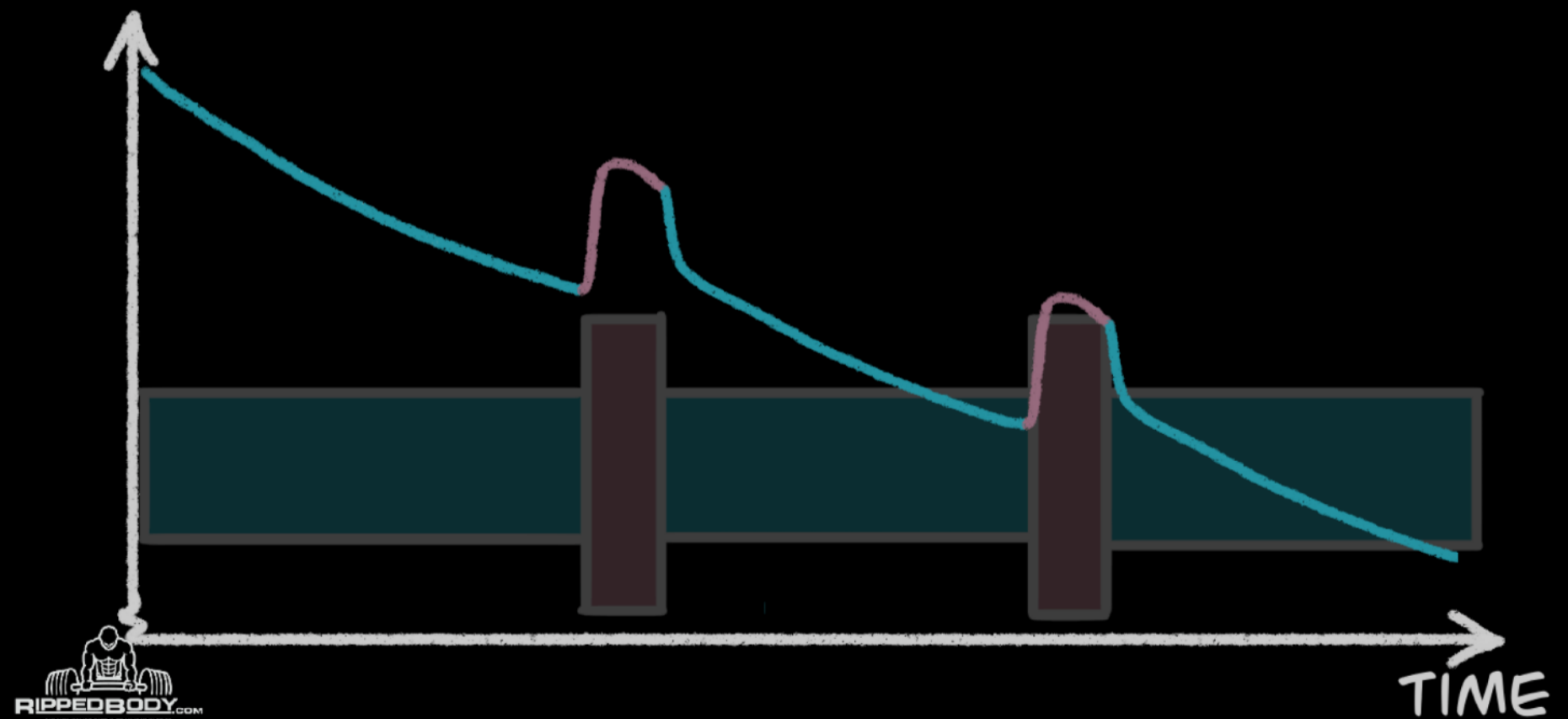
1. This allows you to dig into the details of your program when you have determined that you need to make a change.
2. You need a record of what you lifted the week before so that you can choose what you lift this week. I keep a screenshot of my training program on my phone. I put the phone on airplane mode. This serves the dual function of making sure I'm not disturbed when lifting something heavy and keeping me away from social media distractions.

[Download a copy of the progress tracker here.](#)

If you wish to share this section of the book with a friend, please give them [this link](#).

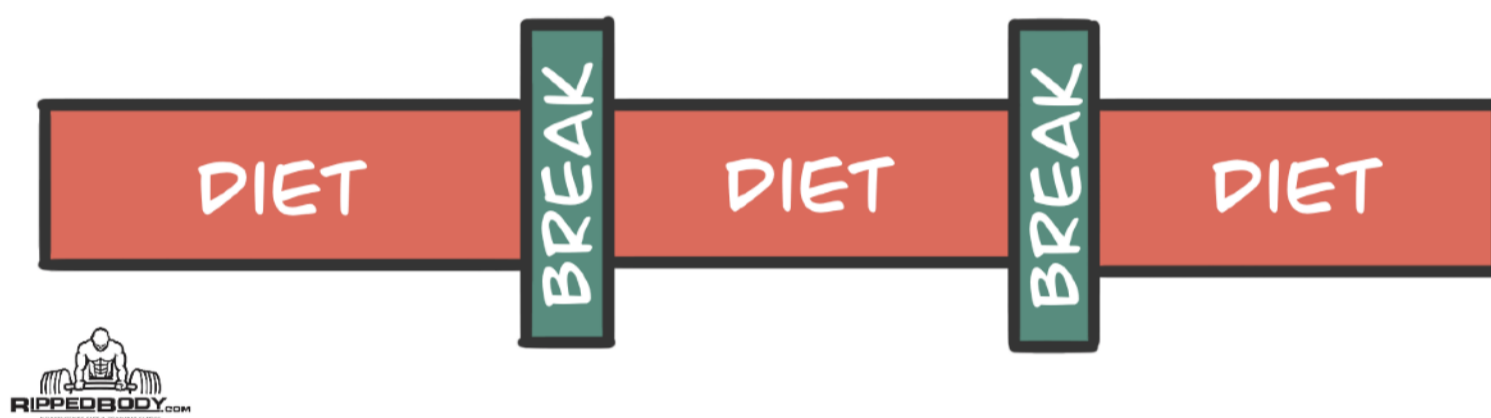
HOW AND WHEN TO TAKE DIET BREAKS

WEIGHT



A *diet break* refers to a *planned* period of 7–14 days, where we increase calorie intake and loosen the counting restrictions we place on ourselves.

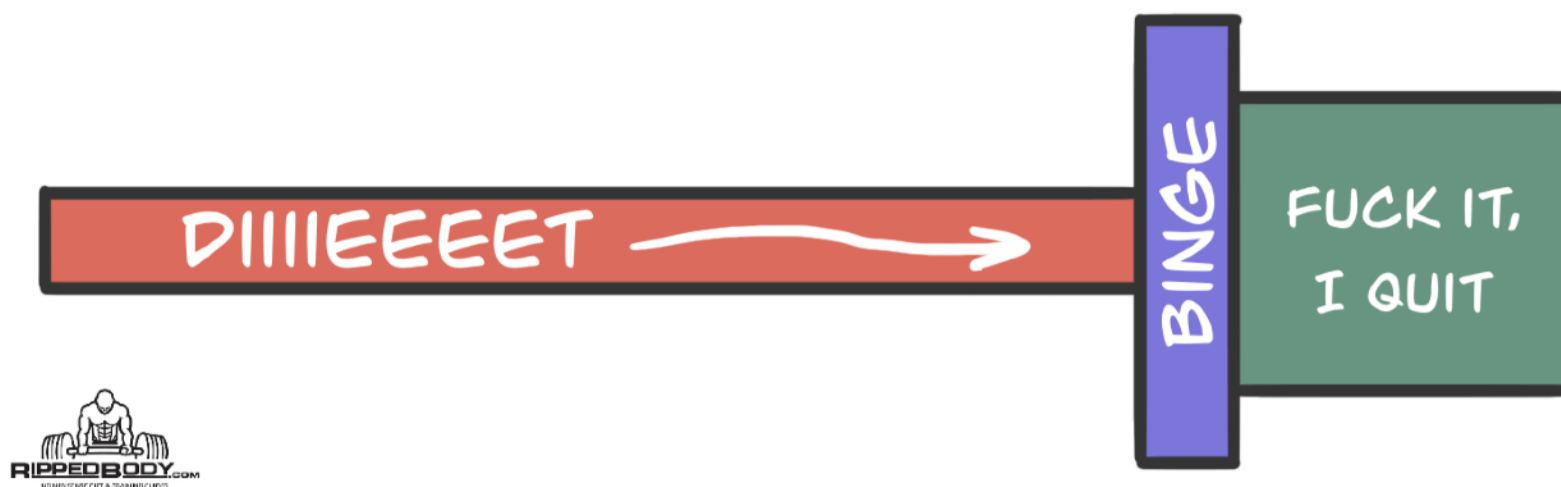
You've probably heard of *periodization* for your strength training, where you break your training up into phases, each with a specific goal. Think of diet breaks as part of something I like to call *nutrition periodization*.



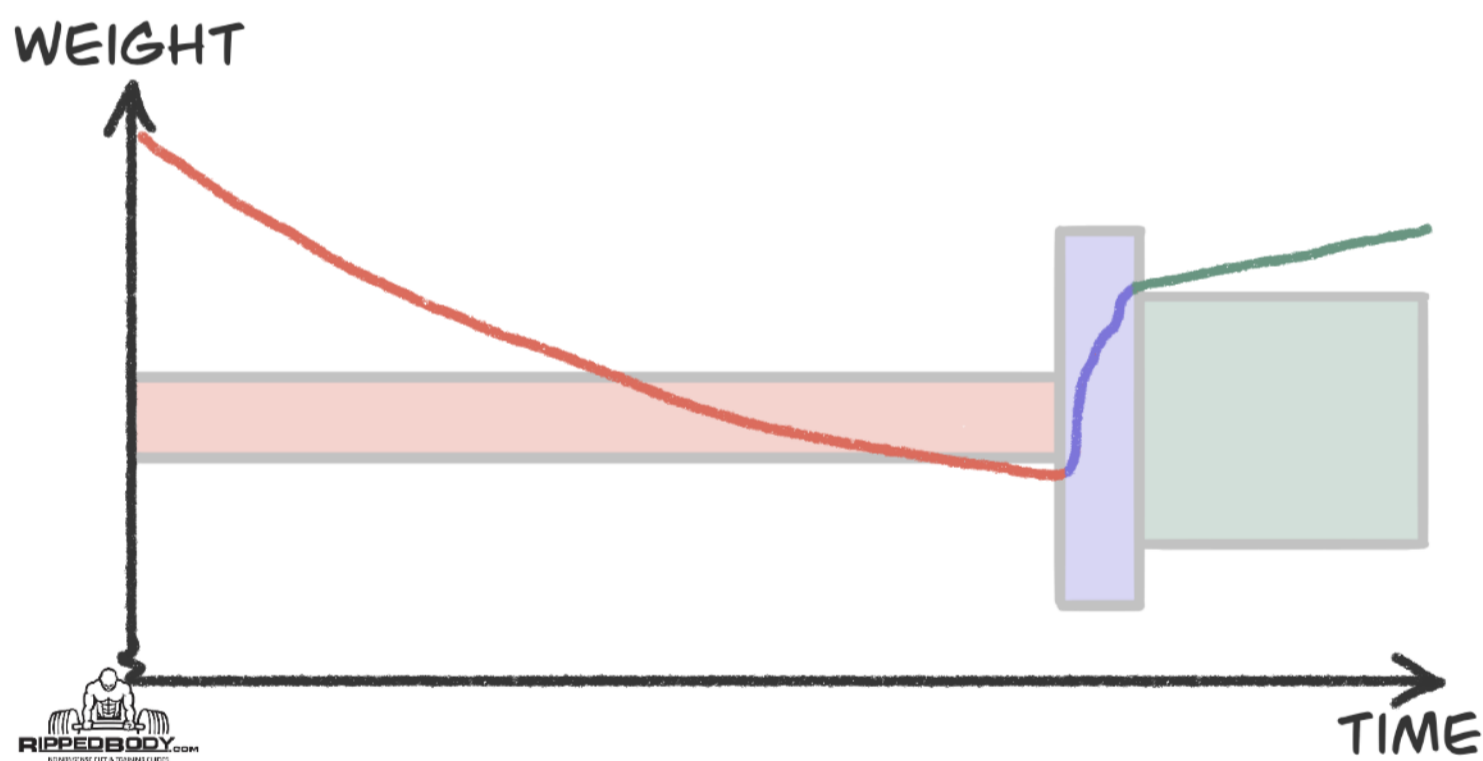
Most people don't think of nutrition as something that can be periodized. But alternating periods of dieting and bulking is nutritional periodization, and diet breaks are a part of that.

When you have a lot of fat to lose, it can be *very* tough to stay motivated for many months at a time. Similarly, when you're trying to get *shredded* lean, the body fights back harder toward the end. Diet breaks help break up the monotony of dieting and make adherence easier.

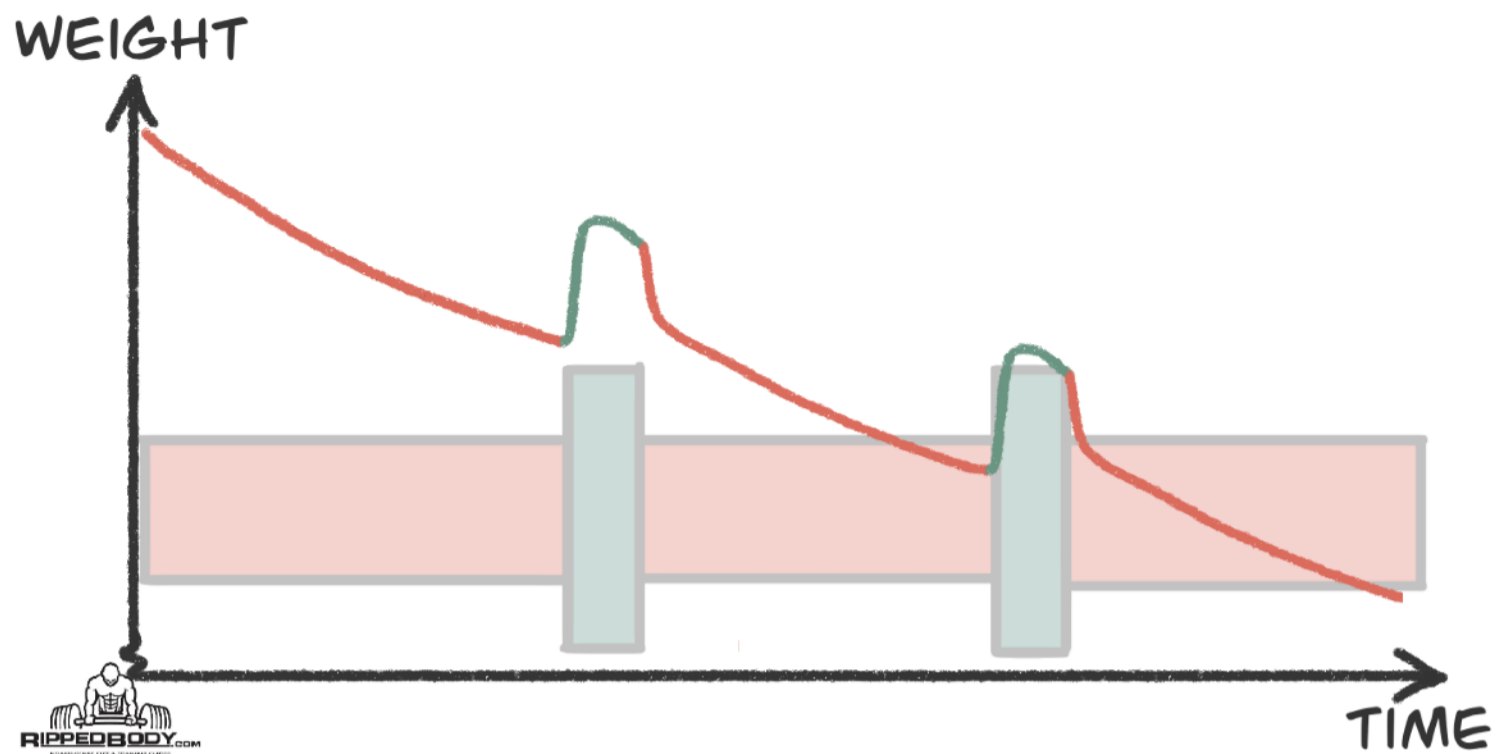
But this is not about mental toughness nor commitment. How you feel right now is *not* an indication of how well you'll be able to adhere months down the line.



Planning for diet breaks is about acknowledging in advance that there are limits to our ability to persevere. It's the smart thing to do. But people skip them at their peril, and the result is usually something like this:



But what we're shooting for is this:



REASONS FOR TAKING A DIET BREAK

Psychological reasons: Taking periodical diet breaks is a good idea for the mental break from the monotony of dieting. (It's similar to why we have weekends – to give us a break from work.)

Physiological reasons: It was thought that a short period of regular eating could reverse some of the metabolic adaptations to a caloric deficit, giving the hormones time to recover to normal levels. This would mean that you'd be less hungry, have more energy, and fewer cravings. However, the effect is smaller and more fleeting than initially thought, so the main reason to consider a diet break is psychological, not physiological.

THE TWO WAYS TO IMPLEMENT A DIET BREAK

I recommend that people designate certain special days of the year to not count calories – Christmas day, your birthday, your wedding anniversary, for example. But I call these ‘*days off*’; they are not what I mean when I say ‘*diet break*.’

There are two ways to implement a diet break: a full break from counting calories and macros and a more controlled version. These both have their place.

THE FULL DIET BREAK

The full diet break is my most common recommendation for coaching clients. It is a break from counting food intake entirely for two weeks.

Here’s how to take a full diet break:

- ▶ Eat to your hunger, don’t count (or worry about) your macro targets, but don’t purposefully binge eat.
- ▶ Keep your regular meal times.
- ▶ Keep on training. You may make some strength gains, given the higher calorie intake. Enjoy it.

These instructions shouldn’t be surprising, but if they seem too easy, you’re probably overthinking it. You will gain some weight this way, but most of it will not be fat for the reasons covered in

the *Why Fluctuations in Weight and Appearance Happen* chapter.

Of the 1000+ people I've been fortunate to have had the opportunity to coach in the last decade, I've only had the full diet break go badly a few times. By this, I mean that they couldn't resist binge eating, and they gained a significant amount of fat because of it.

(Note: I don't work with those who have a diagnosed eating disorder or disordered eating behavior. So, this skews the numbers.)

However, I've had plenty of non-clients *claiming* that they can't do an ad-lib diet break in the comments on the site, which I suspect is simply people confusing water or glycogen gain with fat gain.

THE CONTROLLED DIET BREAK

Some people will benefit from a more structured diet break.

If you've been dieting for a long time and you're experiencing intense cravings, it is probably best that you do not eat ad-libitum. Physique competitors close to competition fall into this category, but ordinary people can find this too. So if someone reports to me that their cravings are especially high, I'll tell them to have a controlled diet break.

Some people truly freak out when told not to count anything. This often comes from an experience where they gained a lot of weight (for the reasons I just covered in the previous section), but they didn't realize it wasn't fat. If after explaining they still can't handle the *full* diet break, I instruct them to take the *controlled* diet break.

HERE'S HOW TO TAKE A CONTROLLED DIET BREAK:

- ▶ Raise calories by 500–700 kcal each day. (I usually take the current rate of weight loss per week in pounds, multiply by 500, and add 100–150 kcal to cover some of the metabolic adaptation.)
- ▶ Remove the macro target; hit your new calorie target to an accuracy of + or – 100 each day.
- ▶ Cut cardio work in half (if performed).
- ▶ Keep your regular mealtimes and keep training.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON DIET-BREAK LENGTH AND FREQUENCY

The following table is based on my observations of what has worked well with online coaching clients over the years.

Body-fat Percentage (Men / Women)	Diet Break Length & Frequency
--------------------------------------	-------------------------------

<10% / 18%	7-10 days, every 6-8 weeks
10-15% / 18-23%	7-14 days, every 8-12 weeks
>15% / >23%	Two weeks, every 12-18 weeks

(As a reminder, you can use the visual guide to body-fat percentage chapter to get an estimate.)

These are just guidelines, not rules. I base the frequency of diet breaks on how a client is doing mentally (mood, cravings, stress), and physically (energy, sleep, recovery).

With lower rates of fat loss, diet breaks can be less frequent. In my coaching experience, I've found that I've never had to recommend diet breaks more frequently than eight weeks, even with those getting shredded lean.

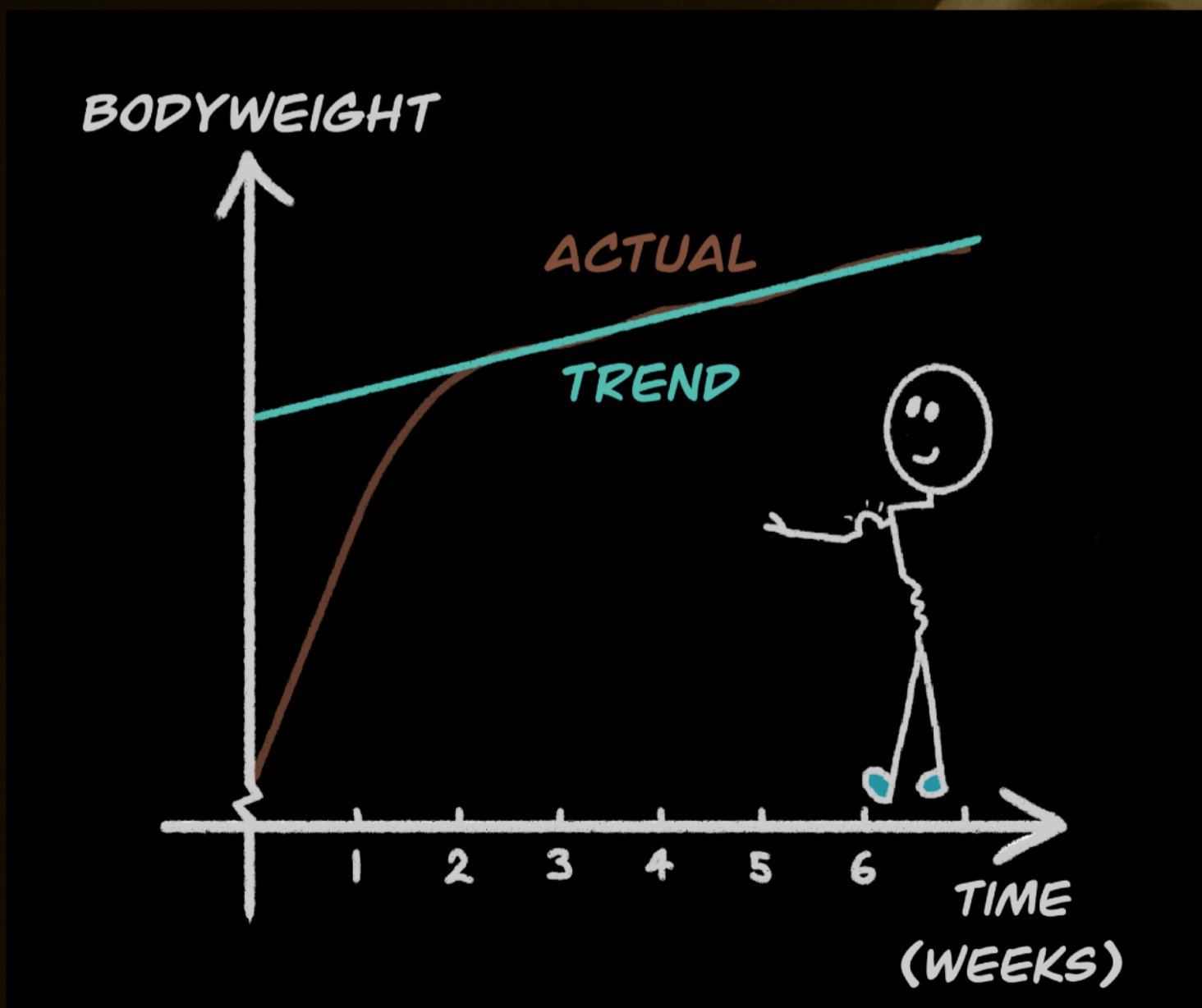
There is no need to take a diet break when bulking, but if you are bored with the monotony of rigid counting, you can take one. The ad-lib diet break is most appropriate.

If you have been dieting for significantly longer than the guidelines I have above and are suffering with,

- ▶ high levels of fatigue,
- ▶ exceptionally high cravings (possibly causing you to frequently binge eat), or
- ▶ any of the symptoms of 'relative energy deficiency' (covered in the *Transitioning To Maintenance* chapter),

consider transitioning to maintenance for a while until you feel better. Follow the guidelines in that later chapter. Consider doing so if you are sick, injured, or under a lot of stress also.

HOW TO CORRECT YOUR INITIAL CALCULATIONS



There are two types of assessment and adjustment needed when cutting and bulking.

The first involves assessing your initial calorie calculations and correcting them if you need to do so.

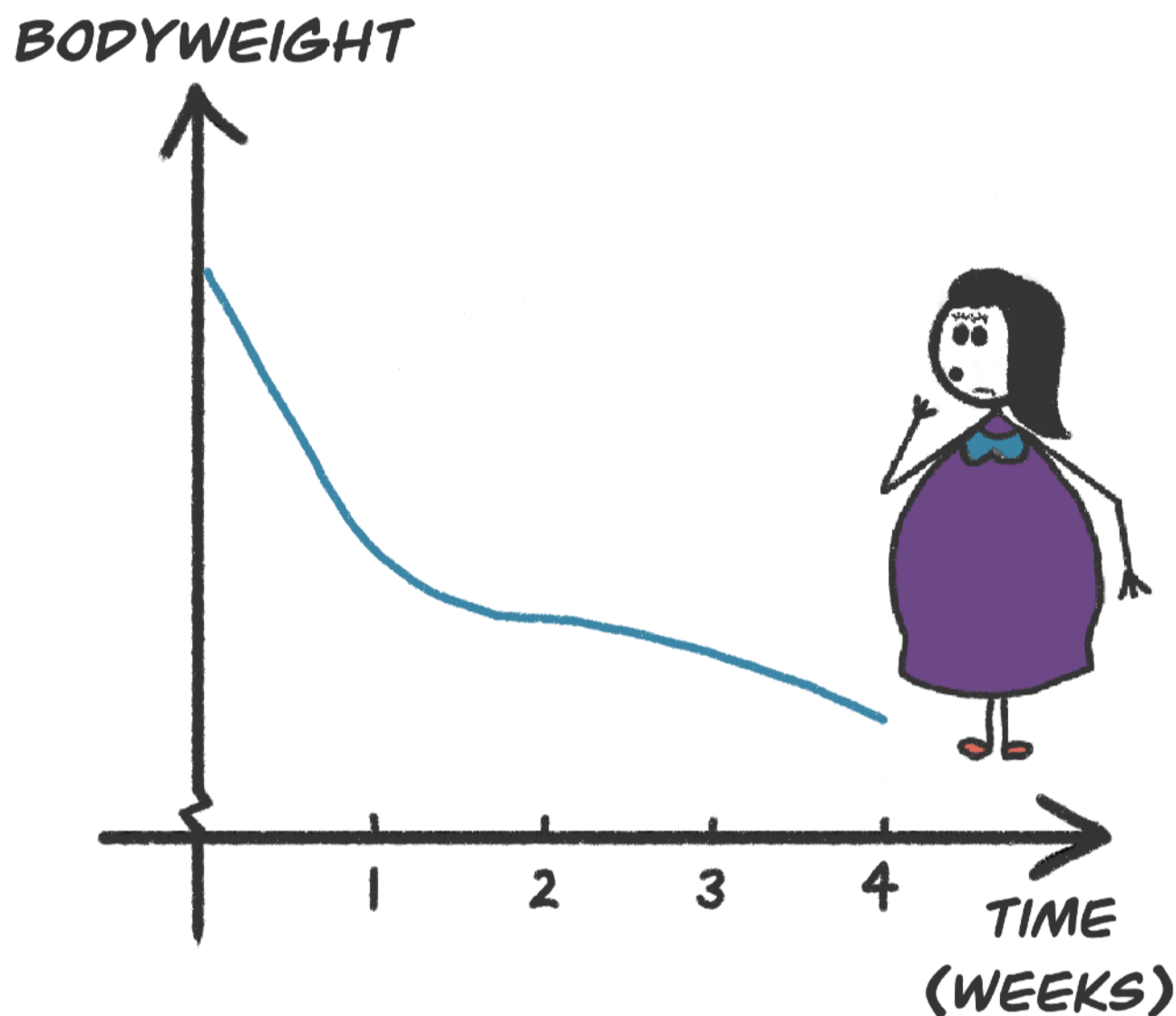
The second type are the ongoing assessments as to whether you need to adjust to keep progressing. I'll discuss this second type in the next chapter.

The most important advice I can give is to *wait patiently before assessing your initial calculations*. You have to wait long enough for a trend line in the scale weight data to develop; otherwise, you're just guessing.

In this chapter, I'll explain how to make the initial assessment and adjustment.

ADJUSTING INITIAL CALORIE CALCULATIONS WHEN CUTTING

The first week of dieting can be super exciting, but then reality sets in.



The bodyweight changes at the start of a cut can be confusing, even when plotting weekly averages.

The blue line is typical of how people see their body weight change when they start cutting. The large initial dip you see is due to the loss in gut content, water, and glycogen stores (as explained in the chapter, *How Cut and Bulk Cycles Actually Look*).

Additionally, if you're new to calorie and macro counting, you can expect to make some mistakes in the first week or two, which will add more noise to the data.

For this reason, I suggest you always ignore your first week or two of data before attempting to assess progress.

EXAMPLE

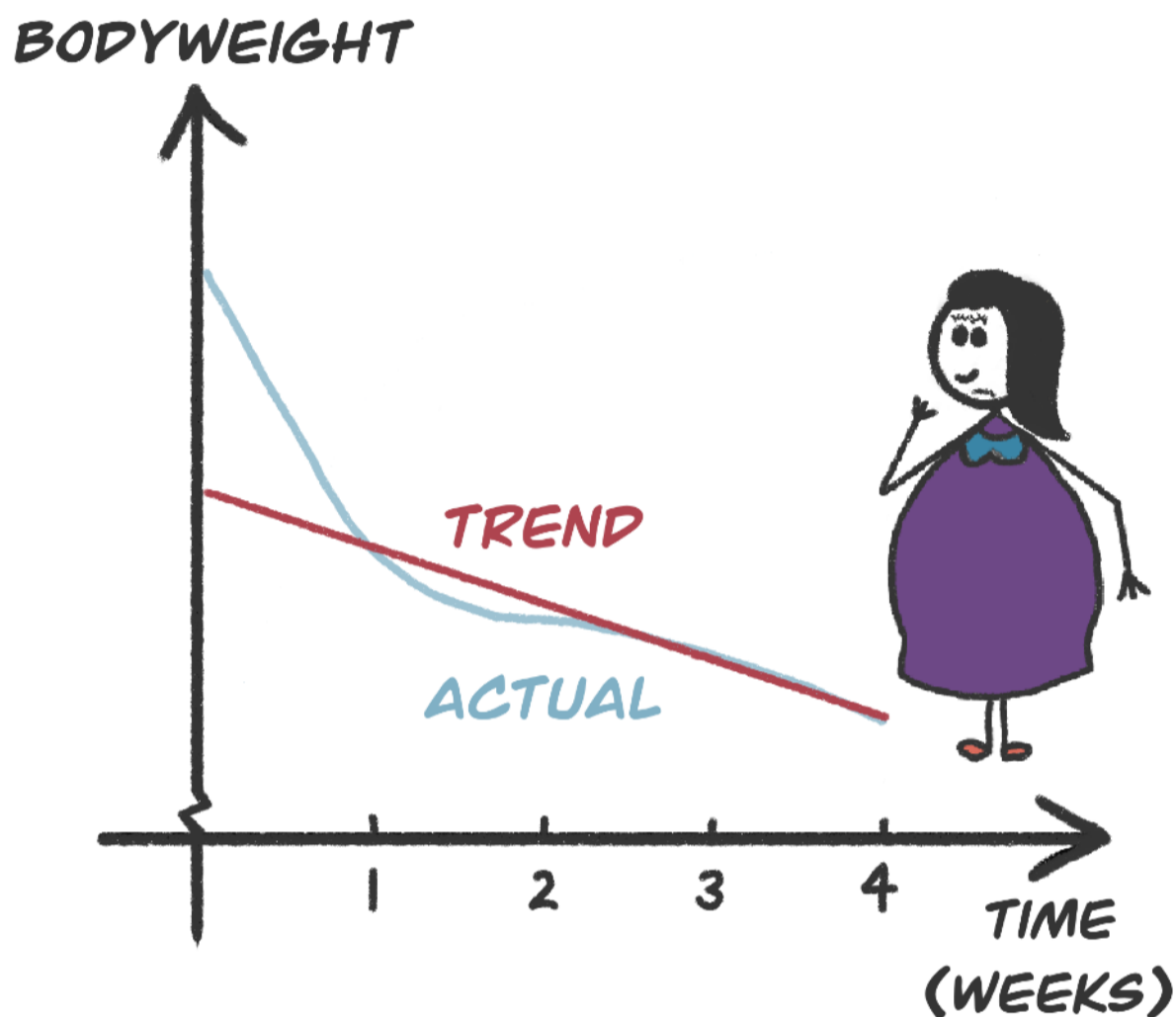
Let's say you are aiming to lose 1 lb per week, and your weight data looks as follows:

Starting weight	160 lbs
End of week 1 average	155 lbs
End of week 2 average	153.9 lbs
End of week 3 average	153.2 lbs
End of week 4 average	152.0 lbs

The rate of weight change evens out after the first week, so discard that first data point.

Looking from the end of week one to the end of week four, it is clear that you're averaging 1 lb per week of weight loss. As this is in line with your target, no adjustment is needed. This also means that of the five pounds you dropped in the first week, four are likely explained by gut content, water, and glycogen

changes. You can expect to gain these back when you bulk or take a diet break.



The trend only becomes clear if you give it time.

But let's say your rate of weight change was above or below your target. How would you adjust?

Well, we know that we need a daily deficit of approximately 500 calories to lose 1 lb of fat, so here's the formula we can use:

$$\text{Daily calorie adjustment} = (\text{Actual rate of weight loss} - \text{Target rate of weight loss}) \times 500$$

- ▶ If your rate of weight loss is 0.5 lbs slower than your target, you need to *subtract* 250 kcal daily.

▶ If your rate of weight loss is 0.4 lbs faster than your target, you need to *add* 200 kcal daily.

(Water fluctuations happen with hormonal changes across the menstrual cycle. For this reason, I recommend that women wait one more week so that they can compare their weight data at the same time in their monthly cycle, without the first week of losses screwing up the assessment.)

So now the next question is, *“How should I change the macros to achieve these calorie changes?”*

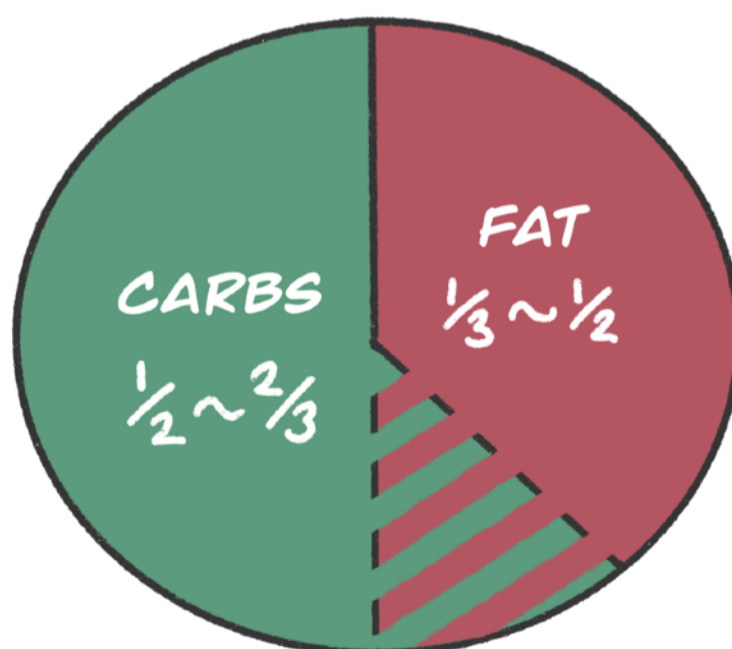
I’m glad you asked...

ADJUSTING YOUR MACROS WHEN CUTTING

We want to choose the least compromising way to reduce calories from our diet. Recall from my [nutrition setup guidelines](#) the broad function of the three macronutrients:

- ▶ Protein is important for satiety and muscle mass retention.
- ▶ Carb intake is important for maintaining training quality.
- ▶ Fat intake is important for hormonal function and for keeping your diet from being boring as hell.

Protein is arguably the most important of the three. Unless you've set your protein intake higher than I have suggested, I'd recommend that you keep protein the same and reduce calories from a mix of carb and fat intake.



Make your calorie reductions in this ratio when cutting.

If you're following my macro guidelines, you'll almost always have a little more room to reduce carbs than fats. Therefore, I'd recommend your calorie reductions come from somewhere between a 1:1 and 2:1 ratio of carb and fat calories, respectively.

Bearing in mind that 1 g of carbs is 4 kcal, and 1 g of fats is 9 kcal, here's a quick reference table of how to make reductions of different calorie amounts.

MACRO ADJUSTMENT EXAMPLES BY CALORIE AMOUNT WHEN CUTTING

Calorie change	Even(ish) split (Recommended)	More carbs (Recommended)	Fat only	Carbs only
~100 kcal	C: 15 g, F: 5 g	-	10 g	25 g
~150 kcal	C: 15 g, F: 10 g	C: 25 g, F: 5 g	15 g	40 g
~200 kcal	C: 25 g, F: 10 g	C: 40 g, F: 5 g	20 g	50 g
~250 kcal	C: 30 g, F: 15 g	C: 40 g, F: 10 g	30 g	60 g
~300 kcal	C: 40 g, F: 15 g	C: 50 g, F: 10 g	35 g	75 g
~350 kcal	C: 40 g, F: 20 g	C: 55 g, F: 15 g	40 g	90 g

Note: I always round daily macro targets to the nearest 5 g.

► So, if you need to reduce your calorie intake by ~250 kcal, I recommend you achieve this by either reducing 30 g of carbs and 15 g of fats or 40 g of carbs and 10 g of fats daily.

- ▶ If you need to increase your calorie intake by ~200 kcal, I recommend you either add 25 g of carbs and 10 g of fats, or 40 g of carbs and 5 g of fats daily.

If you cycle your macros, when you come to reduce (or increase) your calories, feel free to adjust your macros on the training and rest days independently.

- ▶ So, if you need to reduce your calorie intake by ~250 kcal, it would be fine to achieve this by reducing 30 g of carbs and 15 g of fats on the rest day, and 40 g of carbs and 10 g of fats on the training day instead.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU CYCLE MACROS

You can set up your diet to have more calories on some days than others. This is sometimes called *calorie cycling*. As you cannot calorie cycle without the macros changing, it is more commonly referred to as *macro cycling*.

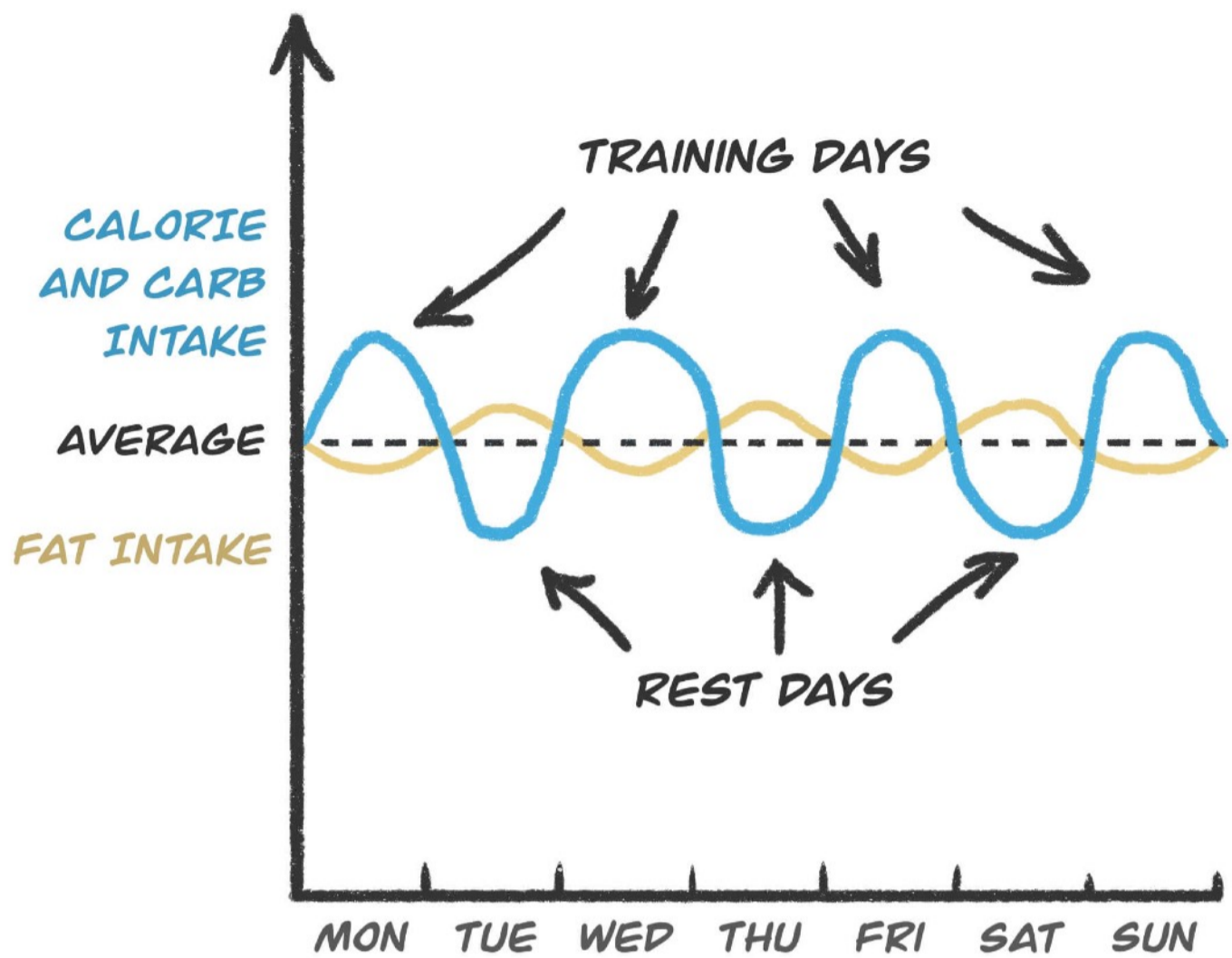
You'll have likely read about macro cycling in either of my books on nutrition setup or my [article on nutrient timing](#). If you haven't read those or don't recall what was there, the key takeaway is that macro cycling is unlikely to give you a better result than a diet where calorie and macros are the same each day. So,

- ▶ If you feel that macro cycling unnecessarily complicates your diet and you find it harder to adhere to, I recommend you avoid it.
- ▶ If macro cycling breaks up the monotony of dieting and therefore you find it easier to adhere to, I recommend you consider it.

The simplest and most common way to cycle macros is by adjusting carb intakes. — If you have a four-day training week, instead of consuming 200 g each day, for example, you may consume 275 g on your training days and 100 g on your rest days.

You may choose to fluctuate your fat intakes also, and this is what I commonly do with clients. But this is because the clients I work with have experience counting their calories and macros, and most appreciate some variety in their diets.

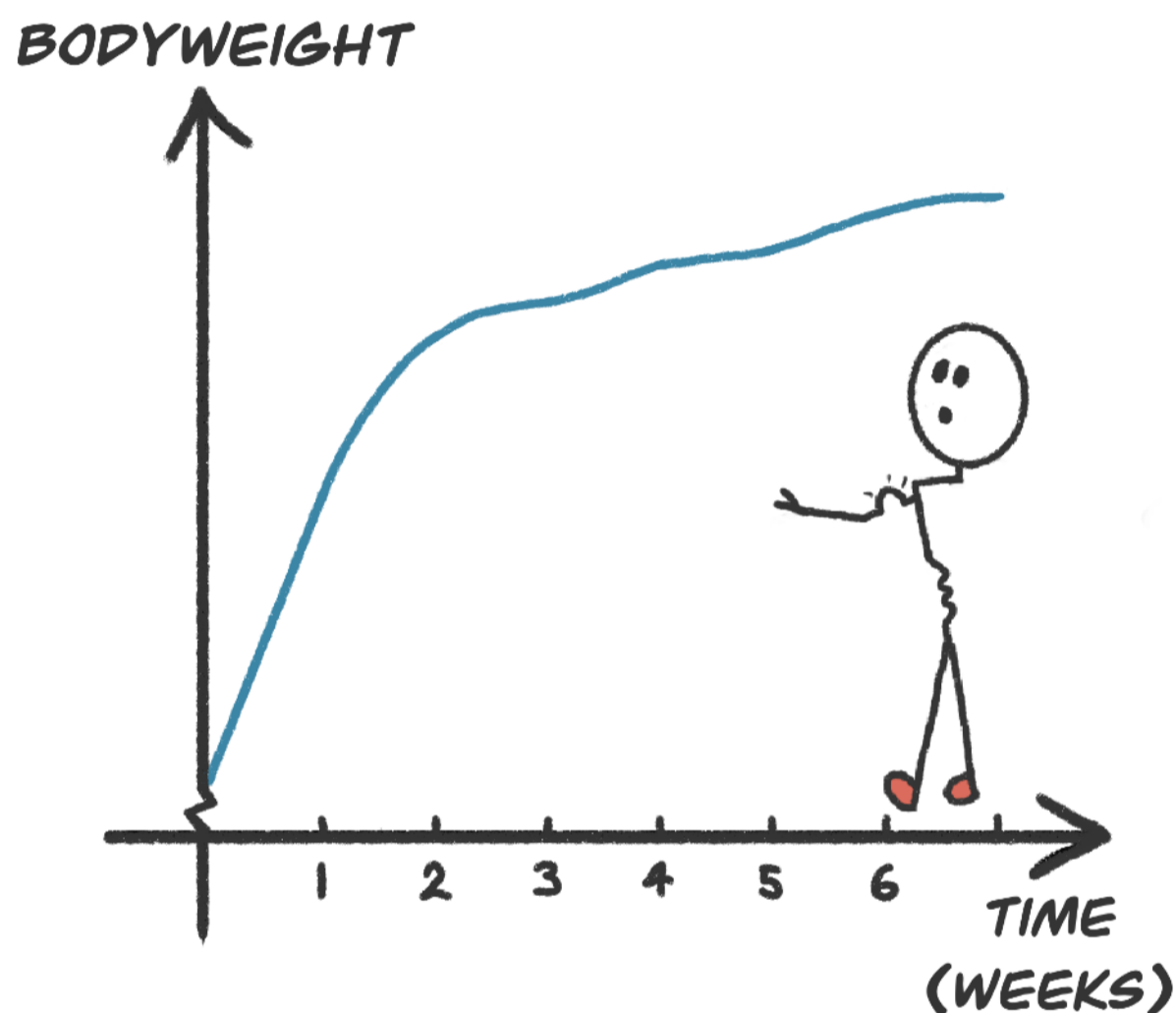
So when you see differing macros for the training and rest day intakes in the client examples later in the book, please don't be under the impression that it leads to better results.



Calorie and macro cycling, with higher-calorie, carb, and lower-fat training days; lower-calorie, carb, and higher-fat rest days.

ADJUSTING INITIAL CALORIE CALCULATIONS WHEN BULKING

Roughly the opposite of what I wrote in the previous section on cutting is true when bulking. But there are some notable differences.



The bodyweight changes at the start of a bulk can be confusing also.

Your body weight data (represented by the blue line) will look roughly the inverse of what it did when beginning to cut. The trend may take longer to become clear though because your target rate of weight gain is likely to be less than your target rate of weight loss.

(Recall that the recommended rates of weight loss are typically in the 0.5-1% per week; recommended rates of weight gain are in the 0.5-2% of body weight per *month*.)

Again, the first week of data will be fairly useless, and the second may well be also if you've been restricting carb intake and as your glycogen stores will take a while to fill. This means that *it would be prudent to wait six or seven weeks before making any adjustment to your bulk calculations.*

Yup, you read that correctly.

Sometimes I make changes earlier than this with clients, but I have a ton of experience spotting trends in data. You don't. Premature adjustments increase noise and make your data harder to interpret. When in doubt, be patient.

EXAMPLE

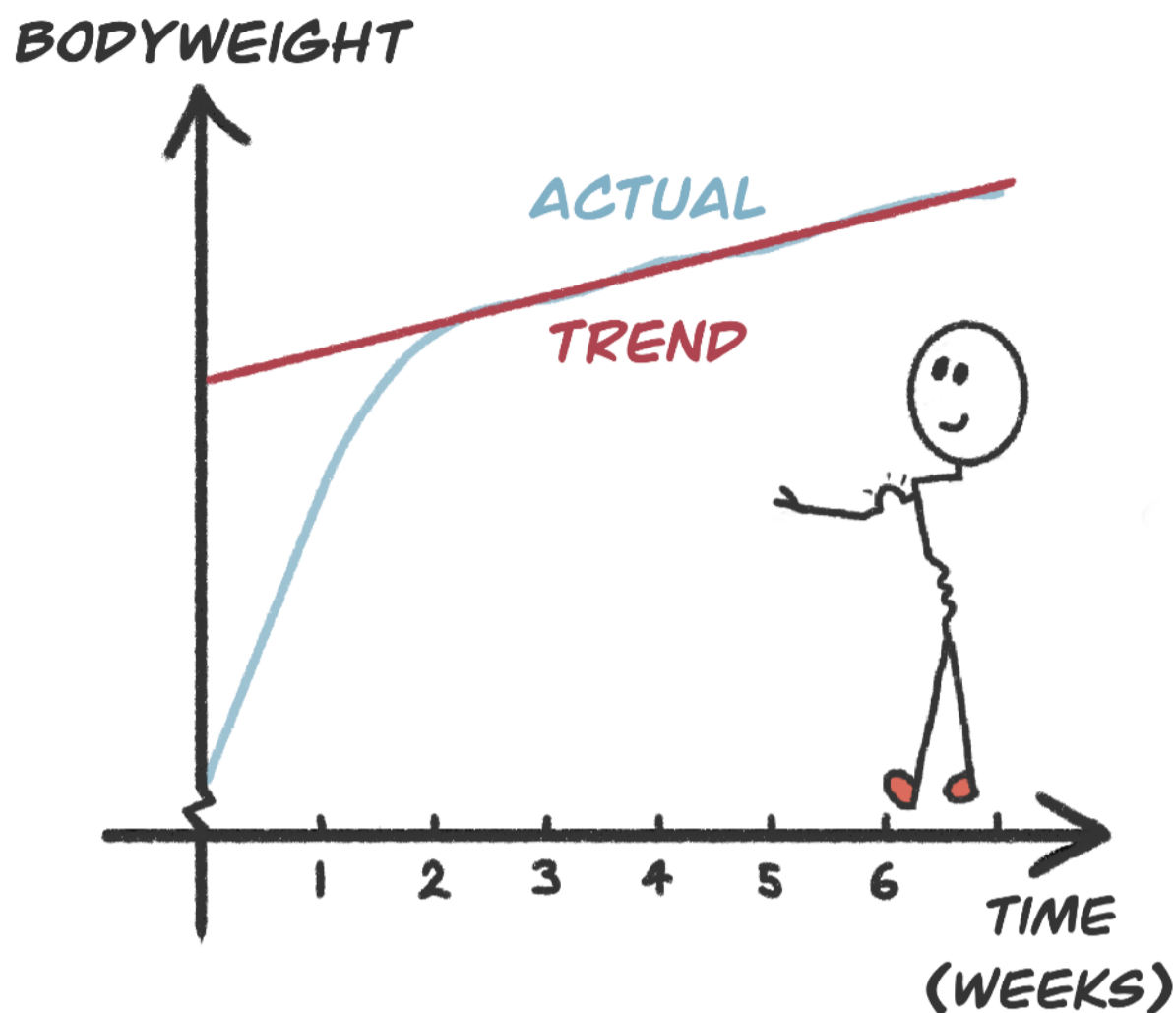
Let's say you are aiming to gain 0.75 lbs per week (~1.5% of your body weight per month), and your weight data looks as follows:

Starting weight	160 lbs
End of week 1 average	165 lbs
End of week 2 average	168.9 lbs
End of week 3 average	169.5 lbs
End of week 4 average	170.1 lbs

End of week 5 average	170.4 lbs
End of week 6 average	171.0 lbs
End of week 7 average	171.4 lbs

It's clear that the rate of weight change evens out at the end of week two onward, so discard the first two weeks where you have the glycogen, water, and gut content gains muddying the data.

From the end of week two to the end of week seven, you've gained 2.5 lbs, which means you are averaging 0.5 lbs per week of weight gain. This is a rate of 2 lbs per month, which is 1 pound slower than your target. You need to make an adjustment. But how?



The trend can take even longer to become clear when bulking.

It takes roughly ~2500 kcal to build 1 lb of muscle and ~3500 kcal to burn or store 1 lb of fat.

Though some do better than others, on average, I see clients gain fat and muscle in a 1:1 ratio during a bulk phase. So, if we hold this as the assumption, and also assume a 30 day month, we will need a 100 kcal daily caloric surplus to gain 1 lb of weight per month (~220 kcal for 1 kg).

However, recall from the *Why We Need To Make Adjustments* chapter, that there will be an increase in energy expenditure from NEAT whenever we increase our calorie intake. We can't predict what this will be, but we know it will happen to a

degree, and I suggest we add 50% on the front end to account for it rather than delay things unnecessarily.

This gives us the following heuristic:

► ***To gain 1 lb of weight per month, add 150 kcal each day (330 kcal for 1 kg).***

So, as weight gain was 1 lb short, add in 150 kcal each day.

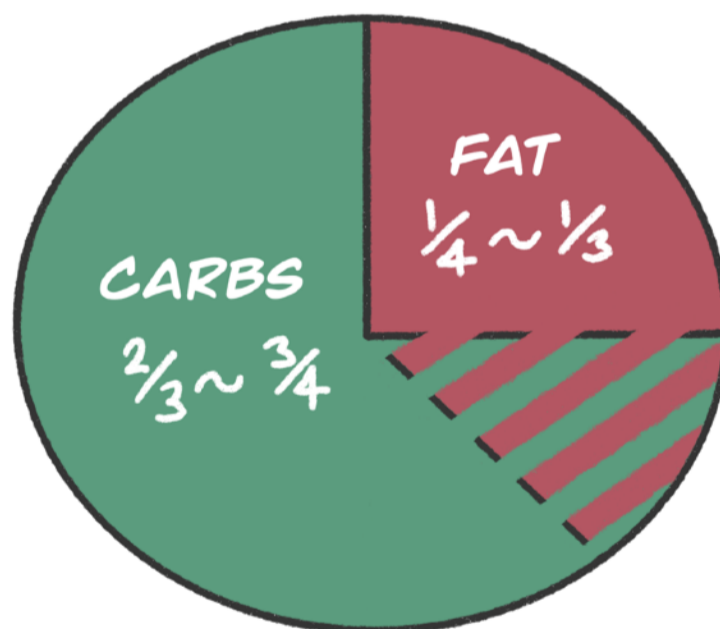
ADJUSTING YOUR MACROS WHEN BULKING

When cutting, our concerns were reducing the macros in the least compromising way possible so that training quality and muscle mass retention aren't affected.

When bulking, our concern shifts toward optimizing for muscle growth without an undue amount of fat gain.

Muscle growth doesn't happen so quickly to justify increasing protein intake beyond the point where it is initially set.

Therefore, as with the cut, the calorie adjustment will come from manipulating the carb and fat amounts.



Make your calorie additions in this ratio when bulking.

As you'll have read in either of my nutrition setup guides, I recommend keeping your fat intake between 20-30% of your total daily calorie intake when bulking. To maintain this, I suggest you make calorie increases by bumping up your carb

and fat intake somewhere between a 3:1 and 2:1 ratio, respectively.

Here's a modified reference table of how to make increases of different calorie amounts:

MACRO ADJUSTMENT EXAMPLES BY CALORIE AMOUNT WHEN BULKING

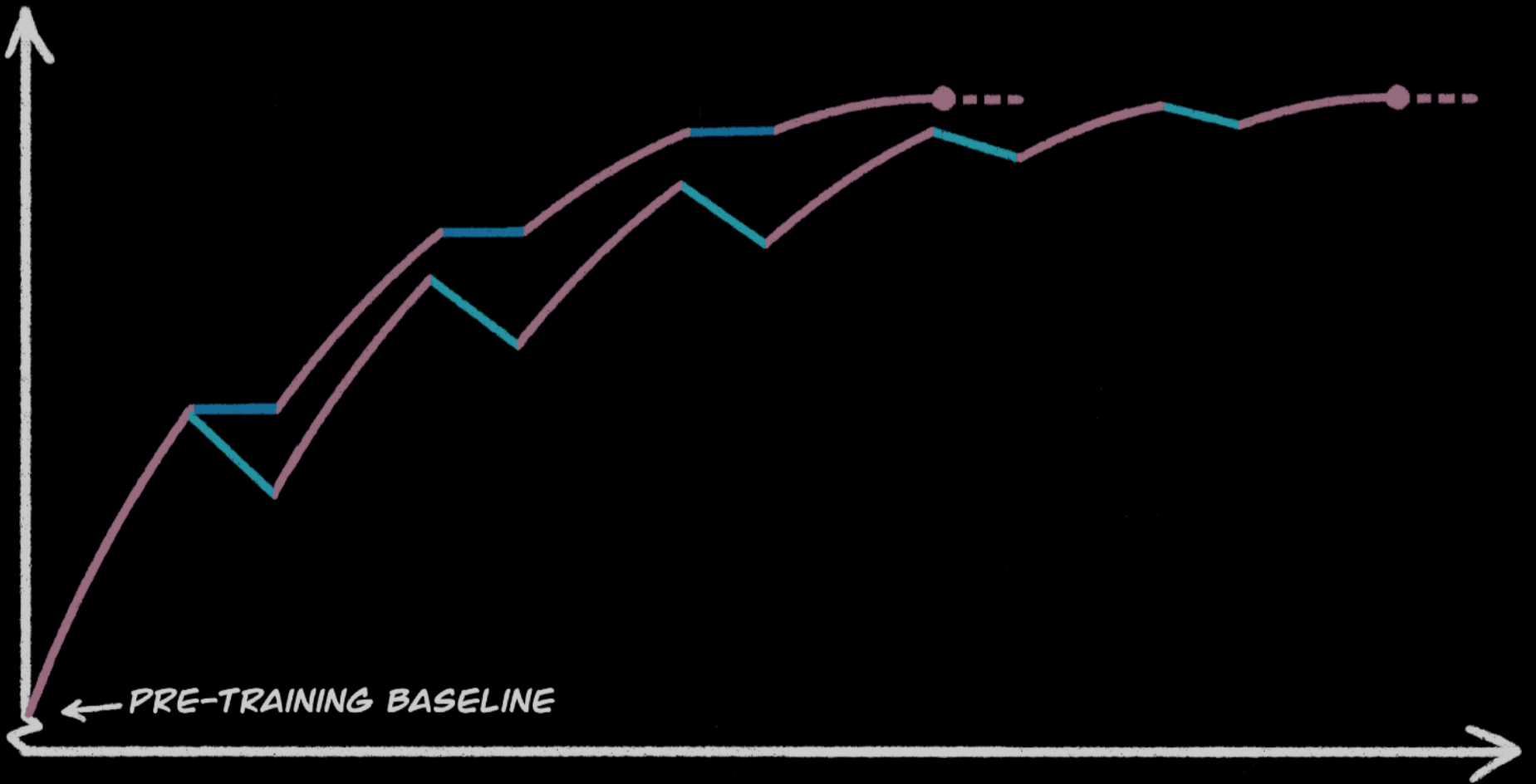
Calorie change	More carbs (Recommended)	Even(ish) split	Fat only (Avoid)	Carbs only (Avoid)
~100 kcal	C: 25 g, F: 0 g	C: 15 g, F: 5 g	10 g	25 g
~150 kcal	C: 25 g, F: 5 g	C: 15 g, F: 10 g	15 g	40 g
~200 kcal	C: 40 g, F: 5 g	C: 25 g, F: 10 g	20 g	50 g
~250 kcal	C: 40 g, F: 10 g	C: 30 g, F: 15 g	30 g	60 g
~300 kcal	C: 50 g, F: 10 g	C: 40 g, F: 15 g	35 g	75 g
~350 kcal	C: 65 g, F: 10 g	C: 40 g, F: 20 g	40 g	90 g
~400 kcal	C: 65 g, F: 15 g	C: 55 g, F: 20 g	45 g	100 g
~450 kcal	C: 80 g, F: 15 g	C: 55 g, F: 25 g	50 g	110 g
~500 kcal	C: 90 g, F: 15 g	C: 70 g, F: 25 g	55 g	125 g

► If you need to increase your calorie intake by ~150 kcal, I recommend you achieve this by adding 25 g of carbs and 5 g of fats to each day.

If you **cycle your calorie and macro intake**, adjust your training and rest days by the same calorie amount but feel free to choose different macro adjustments to achieve it.

WHY WE CARE ABOUT MID-DIET ADJUSTMENTS

MUSCLE
MASS



TIME
(YEARS)



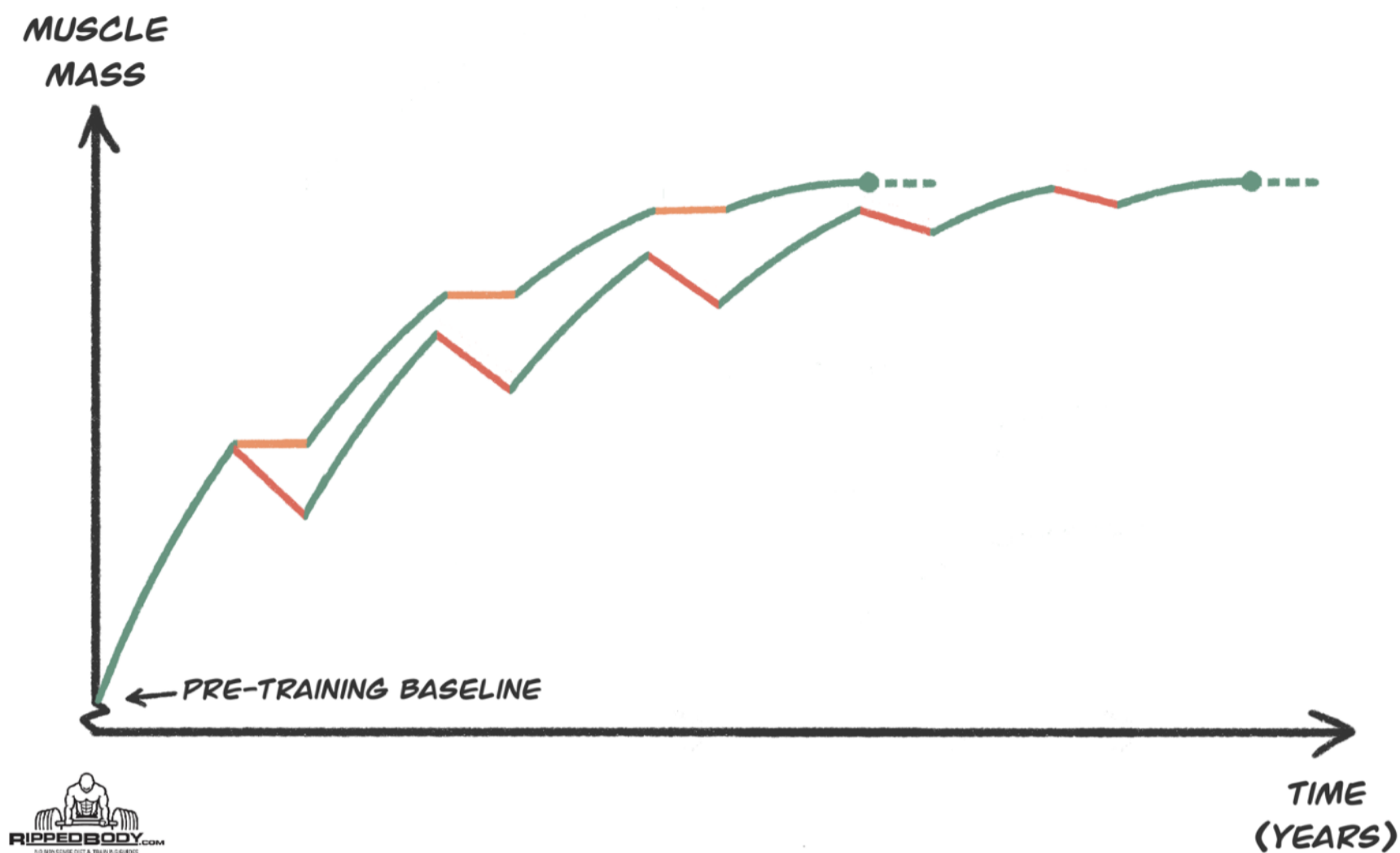
Systematic mid-diet adjustments are the key to long-term progress. If you can be patient and remain calm when interpreting your data, you will achieve your goals in a much shorter time frame. The value of this clinical approach typically only becomes apparent after years of frustration.

AIM TO MAINTAIN MUSCLE MASS WHEN CUTTING

At some point during a cutting phase, we need to reduce calorie intake to keep progressing. But we don't want to slash calories indiscriminately, or we will find the diet hard to sustain and risk losing hard-earned muscle mass.

We want to get to our ideal physique in the shortest number of years possible. Loss of muscle mass is like taking one step backward after every two steps forward; it can cost us months of a cut bulk cycle, which can add up to years over the course of a training career.

Take a look at the sketch on the following page. The lines represent muscle mass and our path to our genetic potential. The green dots at the end of each line represents the point where genetic potential has been reached. The difference between the two lines is that with the one, muscle mass is **maintained** during the cutting phases, but with the other, it is **lost**.



*The path to maximum muscular potential is considerably quicker when muscle is **maintained** when cutting, not **lost**.*

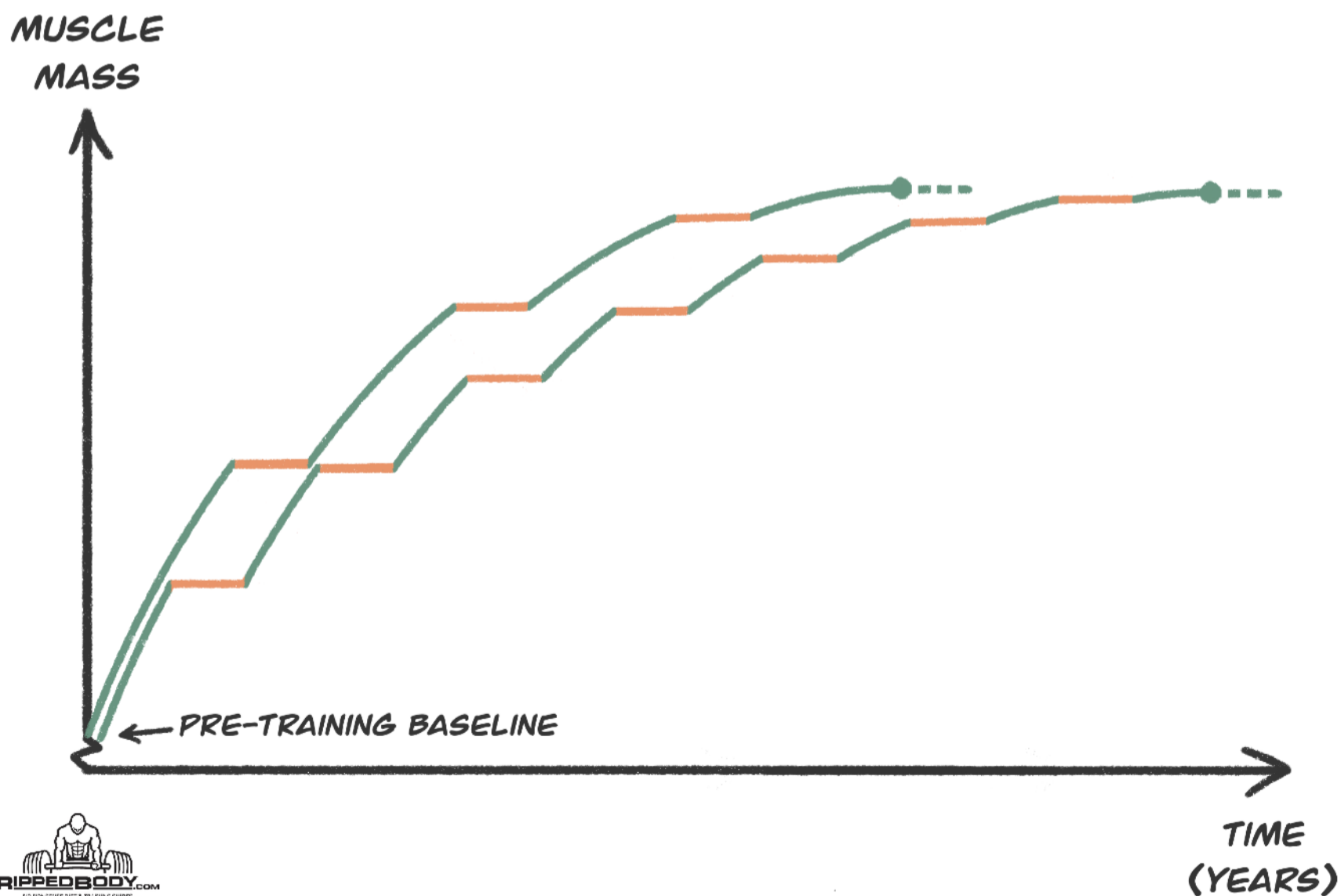
There is a muscle memory effect, where we can regain lost muscle faster than we can build new muscle that I have not quite captured in this sketch. But the point is, if you screw up and lose a significant amount of muscle mass during each cutting phase, it can add years to your journey.

There are several things to check for when assessing whether a reduction in calorie intake is needed. Typically, a reduction is the last thing I consider in a very long mental checklist. I've put that mental checklist into a flowchart in the next chapter.

AIM TO MINIMIZE FAT GAIN WHEN BULKING

As with cutting, at some point we will need to adjust calorie and macro intake to continue to bulk successfully. However, unlike when cutting, where our cautious approach is driven by the desire to not lose muscle mass, when bulking, it's because we don't want to gain an unnecessary amount of fat.

Excess body fat gain means a shorter time spent bulking before you need to cut or a longer time spent cutting the fat off. Again, this is like taking one step backward after every two steps forward, and it can add years to the time needed to get to our ideal physique.

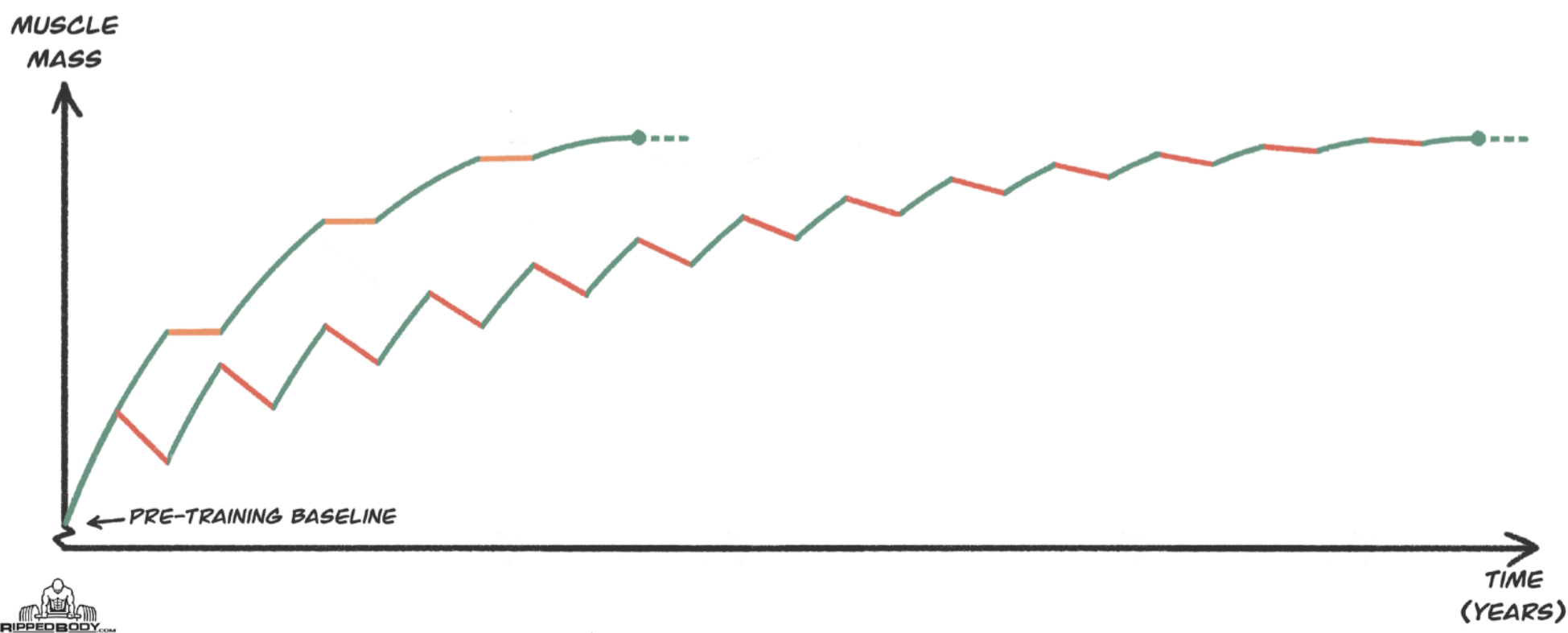


The lower of the two lines in the sketch shows the scenario where you have to end each bulk phase faster than you otherwise would due to fat gain. More frequent cutting phases mean longer periods where **muscle is only maintained**, which also adds years to the total time taken to reach muscular potential.

These bulking adjustments flowchart differs in several ways from the cutting flowchart bar one: the calorie adjustment is the last thing I consider. You'll see this flowchart in the chapter *after* next.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU SCREW BOTH THINGS UP

If you lose a significant amount of muscle mass when cutting and gain too much fat when bulking, the effect on the time it will take you to achieve your desired physique can be *dramatic*:



If this visual doesn't capture the need for care and patience when making mid-diet adjustments, nothing will. Now, let me show you exactly how to end your cycle of frustration.

Has weight gain suddenly stalled?

This might be due to water or gut content. Wait for a couple more weeks.

Has weight gain gradually slowed?

HOW TO MAKE MID-DIET ADJUSTMENTS WHEN CUTTING

Are you sleeping well, managing stress low, and training consistently?

Probably muscle growth along with the fat loss. Don't change anything.

Are you under a lot of stress or have you been sleeping poorly?

It could be water retention. Work on these things as best you can. Consider a diet break*.

Are your hunger levels to the point where decreasing calories further would likely threaten diet adherence?

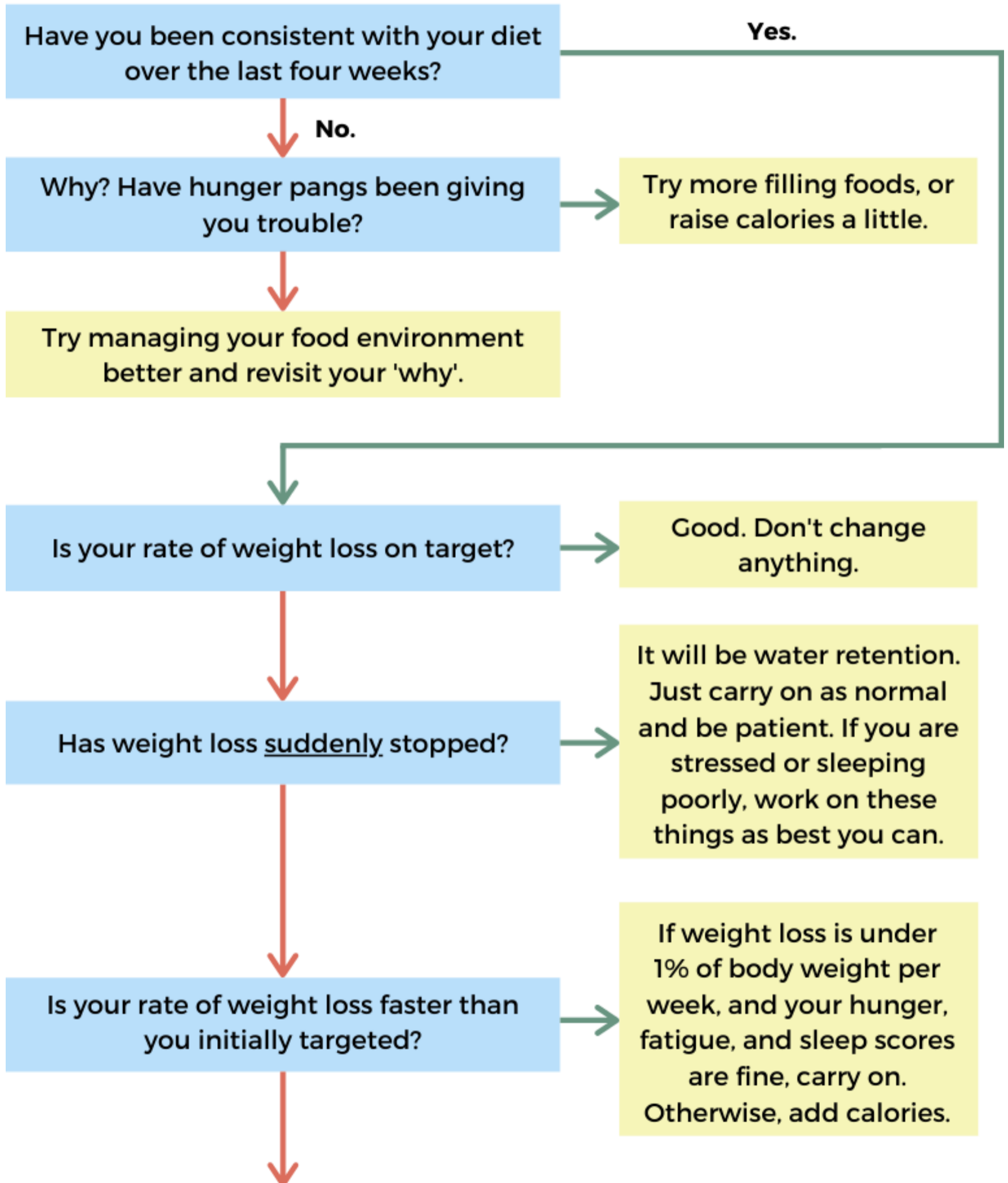
Drink fewer calories and try more filling foods, if you can. Otherwise, just accept the slower rate of fat loss.

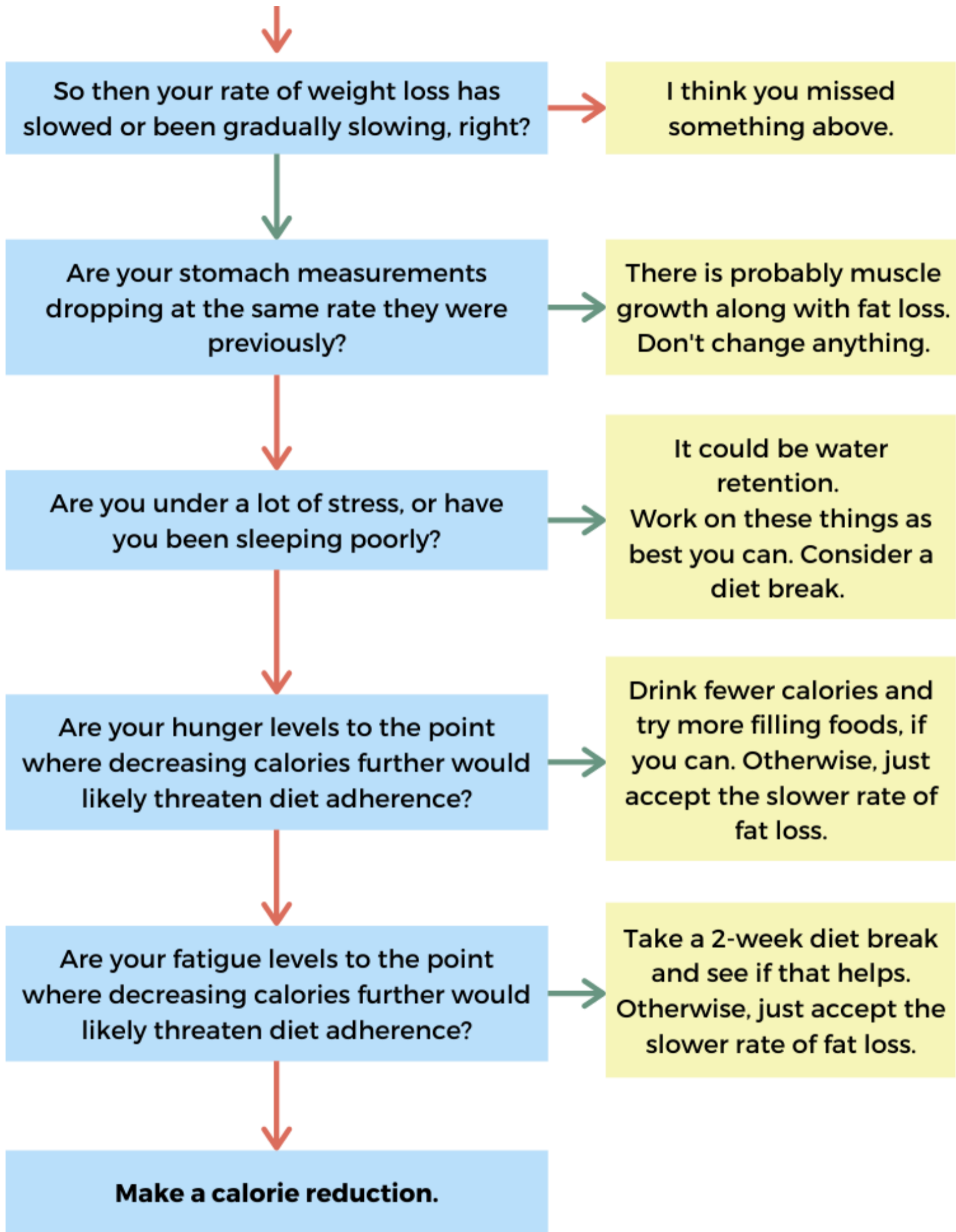
Are your fatigue/lethargy levels to the point where decreasing calories further would likely threaten diet adherence?

Take a 2-week diet break and see if that helps. Otherwise, just accept the slower rate of fat loss.

Make a calorie reduction.

Let's get straight to the flowchart. Explanations come after:



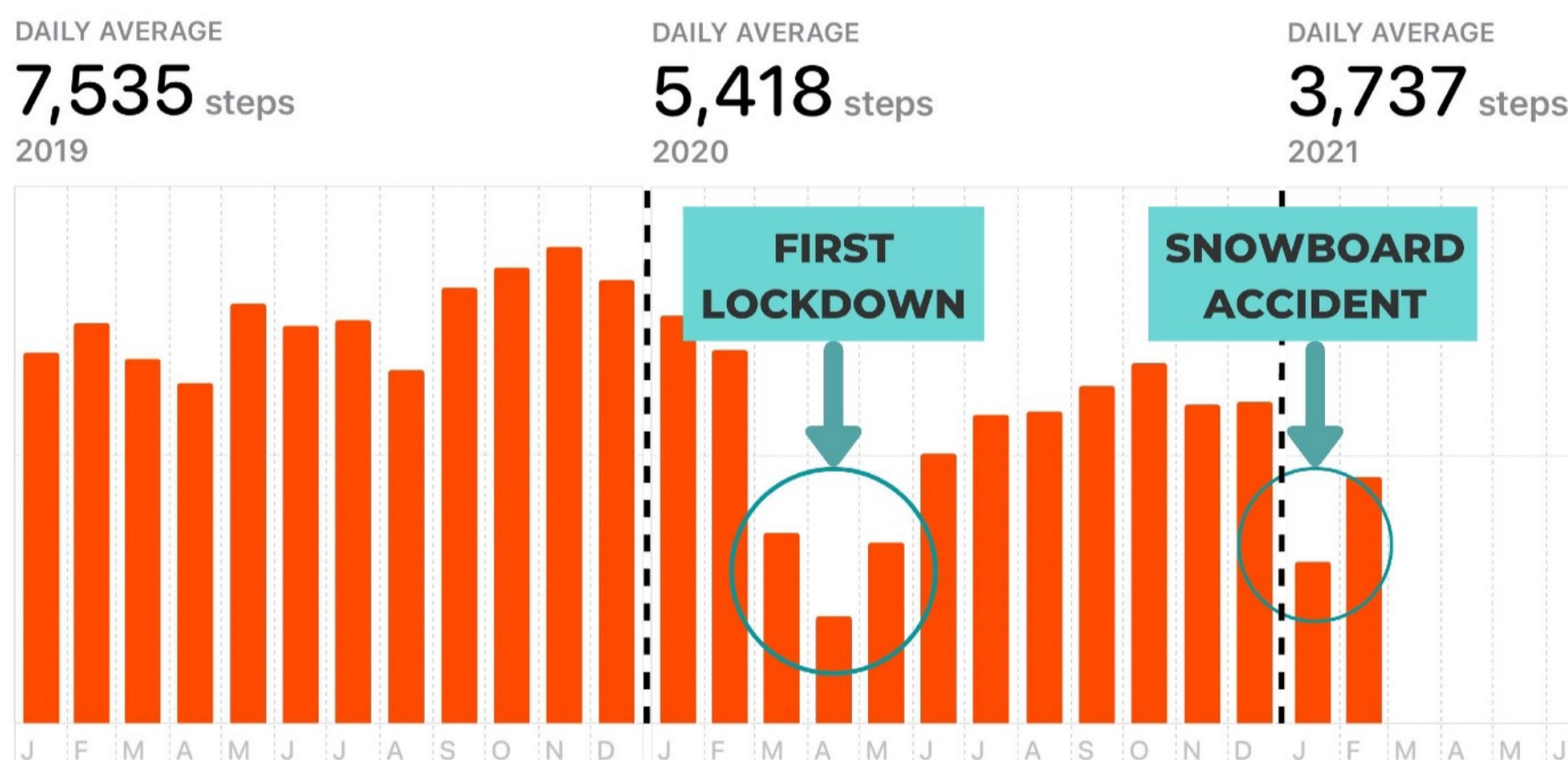


NOTES ON THE CUTTING ADJUSTMENTS FLOWCHART

- 1. You'll notice that a calorie reduction is the last thing to consider.** This keeps us eating as much as possible for as long as possible, which makes the diet more sustainable and minimizes our risk of muscle mass losses.
- 2. If hunger pangs have been giving you trouble:**
 - ▶ Swap any liquid calories for whole food,
 - ▶ Eat more slowly (chew your food 20 times),
 - ▶ Cut down on highly-palatable sugary foods,
 - ▶ Eat more fruit and vegetables, salads and soups,
 - ▶ Consider [lowering meal frequency](#) so that your meals are larger and more satisfying.
- 3. To manage your food environment** means to control things around you in such a way to cause you to think about food a little less, reduce the number of temptations you face, and make it easier for you to make better choices throughout the day. It starts with appropriate food shopping and extends to how to organize things at home. This is a powerful tool that gets neglected by many dieters. I co-wrote an article on this with my friend Patrick Umphrey [here](#).

4. **"Revisit your why"** means to think more deeply about your motivations. Many people don't pay enough attention to this part, and it means that when things get tough, they don't follow through. I wrote an article sharing some of the exchanges with clients about this [here](#).
5. **Stress is the silent killer of muscle mass.** You can't just say to yourself, "Ah, stress will cause water retention, but that's ok, I'll just be patient." It will also impact recovery and thus your ability to hold onto muscle mass. Consider some strategies for managing stress. It is not my place to guide you on specifics, but I wrote my story of how I handled an incredibly stressful period in my life [here](#).
6. **Poor sleep has a similar effect to stress.** It will exacerbate hunger issues, and your training response will be dampened. It's hard to say how much sleep is too little, but if you wake chronically tired, you need to get more. Here's some [advice for getting a better night's sleep](#).
7. **We're using bodyweight as the primary guide** and not panicking if the body measurements don't change much. Measurements can be prone to error and don't always pick up the changes in the short term anyway. — More on what to expect from your measurements later.
8. **If your average daily activity levels have decreased, you'll probably need to make a reduction.** However, I recommend you wait to see the effect on weight loss rate rather than proactively trying to adjust because the calorie

burn estimations of most apps can't be trusted. Many clients went through periods of lockdown in 2020. This barely affected some people's energy needs but considerably altered others. If you have the step tracking feature turned on on your phone, you'll be able to track your steps. Here's how that looks:



My daily step counts according to my phone—2019 to February 2021.

From March to May 2020, you can see a dramatic reduction in my daily step count. Though I labeled it “first lockdown,” technically, there was never a lockdown in Japan, only “strong urges” from the government to stay home as much as possible. I took this to a bit of an extreme, not seeing anyone. I was eating the same but put on a little fat. Realizing how drastically my

activity levels had been hit when I opened this app for the first time, I decided to go for more walks in the park.

In January of 2021, a tree rudely jumped out at me while I was snowboarding. I was on crutches for most of that month, which is why the activity levels plummeted.

The changes you will see when you diet won't be as obvious. But it's not uncommon to see a gradual decline in your step count due to increased lethargy (this is NEAT, discussed in the *Why Adjustments Are Needed* chapter).

One way to counter this is to set yourself a minimum step target for the day when dieting. I set myself a daily minimum of 5000 steps from June onward, which was worse than the 7500 I was averaging prior to COVID but considerably better than the 2500 I was getting when left unmonitored.

WHAT ABOUT CARDIO?

There is no rule on when you should add in cardio to address calorie balance rather than decrease calorie intake further. But here's how I think about it.

You may have come this far and wonder why I have not recommended cardio as an alternative to a calorie reduction.

Mainly, it's because cardio as a tool for fat loss is *highly* time-inefficient. The following charts will help explain what I mean.

As a reminder, we need a 500 kcal daily deficit to lose 1 lb of fat per week.

CARDIO: ESTIMATED RATES OF CALORIE BURN					
(Per 10 minutes)					
Type of Cardio	120lbs (54kg)	140lbs (64kg)	160lbs (73kg)	180lbs (81kg)	200lbs (90kg)
Light (RPE 2-4)	24 kcal	28 kcal	32 kcal	36 kcal	40 kcal
Moderate (RPE 5-7)	64 kcal	69 kcal	74 kcal	82 kcal	90 kcal
Vigorous (RPE 8-10)	84 kcal	98 kcal	112 kcal	126 kcal	140 kcal

How to Gauge the Intensity of Cardio	
RPE 1-2	Very light effort. You can talk with ease.
RPE 3-4	Light effort. You can talk with almost no difficulty.
RPE 5	Moderately light effort. You can talk comfortably with minor difficulty.
RPE 6	Moderate effort. You can talk with minor difficulty.
RPE 7	Moderately high effort. Talking is difficult.
RPE 8	High effort. Talking is very difficult.
RPE 9	Very high effort. Talking is maximally difficult.
RPE 10	Maximal effort. Talking is impossible.

RPE = Rating of Perceived Exertion

Let's say you need an additional 200 kcal deficit, but you don't want to eat any less. If you're 180 lbs, this is 25 minutes of moderate-intensity cardio you need to do *every single day* to lose a mere 0.4 lbs extra each week.

This is not sustainable, and if taken to an extreme, can interfere with muscle and strength adaptations.

- ▶ **As a rule of thumb, your cardio for the week should be less than half the time you spend lifting weights.** So, if you strength train for four hours per week, perform no more than two hours of cardio.
- ▶ **Preferably, choose a low-impact modality where your knees don't take a pounding.** Brisk walking on an incline treadmill, swimming, the elliptical, or cycling are preferable to jogging on a hard surface. This is especially true if you carry a lot of excess weight or have knee pain.
- ▶ **Preferably, avoid high-intensity interval training.** The recovery needs are greater, and the injury risks are a little higher. As a reminder, if you do HIIT, you don't get to choose the *vigorous* row for calorie burn. It's high-intensity *interval* training, so you would choose the "moderate" row.
- ▶ **Lastly, bear in mind that adding cardio won't necessarily help you with hunger issues.** If you add in more exercise, your hunger will go up as a consequence also.

MAKING AN ADJUSTMENT

Option 1: Repeat the calculation from the *How To Assess and Correct Your Initial Calculations* chapter.

This can give a sense of false precision, as there will be noise in the data from non-fat mass changes, so I prefer to do the following...

Option 2: Decrease overall energy intake by around 5-8%.

For most people, this is a 100–200 kcal reduction. To save you scrolling, here's the appropriate section from the table in the initial adjustments chapter.

Calorie change	Even(ish) split (Recommended)	More carbs (Recommended)	Fat only	Carbs only
~100 kcal	C: 15 g, F: 5 g	–	10 g	25 g
~150 kcal	C: 15 g, F: 10 g	C: 25 g, F: 5 g	15 g	40 g
~200 kcal	C: 25 g, F: 10 g	C: 40 g, F: 5 g	20 g	50 g

THINGS YOU WILL NOTICE AS YOU CUT

THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

▶ **Your weight *may* drop much faster than you are targeting.**

Don't get excited; it is not all fat loss. This happens due to

water, gut content, and glycogen losses. The more you drop your calorie and carb intake, the greater the drop. However, if your vegetable intake increases significantly, this will cause more gut residue and have an opposing effect.

- ▶ **Don't be surprised if you have a relatively large and sudden decrease in the mid and lower-stomach measurements** (1.5–2.5 cm, 0.5–1"). This is due to the lower gut content. It will be hard to see any trend in the stomach measurement data during the first weeks.
- ▶ **You may experience an increase in the chest and limb measurements if you have started a new training program.** This will be due to muscle swelling (aka 'the pump'), not muscle gain. If the thought, "*OMG, my legs are growing so fast I'm not going to fit into any of my jeans at this rate!*" crosses your mind, then you can relax. You've just started training your legs properly. This isn't muscle growth. Fat loss will outstrip any muscle gain, and your legs will be smaller overall.
- ▶ **Hunger shouldn't be an issue.** You may even feel quite full if you have reduced your meal frequency and started to eat more vegetables. But don't get complacent and think dieting is easy. Enjoy this while it lasts.
- ▶ **Energy levels throughout the day will mostly be unaffected.** The diet hasn't quite kicked in yet. Again, don't get complacent.

▶ **You will probably continue to perform well in the gym.**

Glycogen stores aren't yet depleted. Fatigue hasn't had time to build up into a noticeable recovery deficit yet.

AFTER THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

▶ **Your weight will continue to drop, but more slowly.** This is because the decrease in weight is now caused by fat loss only. You'll start to be able to estimate the rate of fat loss.

▶ **The drop in stomach measurements will become linear, and you will start to see a trend.** As a rough guide, every 4–5 pounds of fat loss will show itself with a 2–2.5 cm (~1") reduction on the stomach in two or more places.

▶ **In the 10–20% body-fat range,** fat loss tends to happen from the upper abs first and works its way down. At the higher end of the range, you can expect to see more movement in the upper-stomach measurements than the lower; as you lean out, you'll see more reduction from the measurements at the navel and lower.

▶ **At 10% body fat and below,** you will see minimal change in the mid and upper-stomach measurements. The lower-stomach measurement and waist measurement will change the most because the fat on your very lower abs and back is coming off at this point. For this reason, visual changes will be hard to notice from the front, especially when getting

leaner than 8% body fat when the fat on the abs is pretty much gone entirely.

- ▶ **Above 20% body fat**, the measurements seem to drop fairly uniformly across all the stomach measurements. I assume this is because the majority of the fat loss at this point is *visceral* (the stuff around your organs) rather than *subcutaneous* (the fat under your skin).
- ▶ **You can expect there to be gradual decreases in the chest and limb measurements.** Don't take this to mean muscle loss. If you reach your right arm around and under your left armpit and grab your back at chest level, you'll notice the fat immediately. It's the same for many places on your body. Yes, fat is concentrated on the stomach, but we carry it everywhere.
- ▶ **You may feel that you look worse as you start to lose definition.** This is natural; try not to get down about it.
- ▶ **There will be a gradual shift toward feeling hungry most of the time.** Eating will become a pleasure, and foods will become tastier. This is your body trying to get you to eat more.
- ▶ **Those with a lot of fat to lose will see an improvement in their blood markers for disease risk.**
- ▶ **You'll start to feel happier with your appearance as you lean out.** But you may start to feel small. (More on this in the next section.)

TOWARD THE END OF THE CUT

- ▶ **You may be the least happy with your appearance.** The point just before ab definition comes through is the hardest part of cutting. You're tired, irritable, always hungry, and you will be your skinniest without the obvious reward. Push through. Bear in mind that nearly all the people you see on the results page are smaller overall, but leanness can make us look bigger when shirtless.
- ▶ **You may experience a loss in libido.** Hormonal changes happen as the body winds down non-essential functions like reproduction. Dieting is managed starvation, and your body doesn't know we are doing it purposefully and aren't about to die due to a famine.
- ▶ **Hunger will be your constant companion.** A celery stick will start to look delicious. Managing your food environment so that you don't have easy access to tempting treats will be critical. Willpower alone can't be relied upon.
- ▶ **Training will start to suck.** Everything will be more challenging. You'll be tempted to change things up, but don't. The prolonged diet has taken its toll on your energy levels. You are (relatively) glycogen depleted. There is also a mechanical inefficiency of being leaner that will affect your big lifts.

HOW MUCH HUNGER AND FATIGUE IS ACCEPTABLE?

HUNGER

As long as you can adhere, this is really up to you. The critical point here is adherence. You don't want to get yourself in a binge-starve cycle, where the diet is so hard to adhere to that you end up binge eating. The most common pattern is where people are overly strict on the weekdays and throw it away on the weekends. If you find yourself unable to sustain things, increase your calorie intake and accept a slower weight loss rate.

FATIGUE

As mentioned, your workouts may become considerably harder toward the end of a cut. If you struggle so much that your strength drops considerably, it may be best to increase your calorie intake and accept a slower weight loss rate.

TRAINING & MUSCLE MASS PRESERVATION

This is a book about diet adjustments, not training. But as it is so important, there are a few things worth mentioning.

1. **Training is arguably the most important tool to prevent muscle loss when dieting;** ensuring that we lose weight at a

sensible rate is an inseparable part of this. Protein intake comes third to these two.

2. **You don't have to change your training style when you cut,** but you will find it harder to progress. At some point, that progress is likely to stop.
3. **On average, people progress during the first half of the cut and have to work hard to maintain their progress during the latter half.** If they decide to get any leaner than 10% body fat, there will often be some regression. But these are just averages, and there are many different factors at play.
4. **Some lifts will progress better than others.** Rarely are people equally experienced in all lifts. Expect good progress with any new (or unfamiliar) lift as you gain competency with your technique, but don't take this to signify muscle growth. People coming back to training after time off can expect to make significant progress also.
5. **The bench press (and pushing exercises in general) tend to suffer the most,** but that's the combination of people generally having more experience here, as well as the loss of fat from the back and chest, meaning the bar has to travel further.
6. **The mind has a powerful effect on the body. Keep a positive mindset.** Interestingly, some people tell themselves they won't make any progress in a deficit, which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The inverse can be true also.

7. **Stress and sleep issues will hamper how well you respond to training.** Do your best to manage these things. Take these things into account when you assess your training.
8. **Lastly, different people are just *different*.** I've seen some guys make progress throughout the entirety of a cut; I've seen some people get stuck earlier than I would expect.

Practically then, here is what I say to clients:

We'll diligently implement the [progression rules](#) and take what progress we can, but we must accept that it will be harder to come by.

At some point, progress may stop in some lifts. When this happens, it is especially important to not get frustrated and let our form get sloppy cause this is when injuries happen.

Stick to the [RPE guidelines](#). Work hard. Stay patient. The muscle gain is going to come in the bulking phase.

Yes, loss of strength *can* be a sign of muscle loss. But I can't say I have seen this to any significant degree in my ten years of coaching. If we continue to train appropriately hard, lose weight at an appropriate rate, eat a sufficient amount of protein, and consume enough carbs to sustain your training, we don't have to worry about muscle losses.

Have you been consistent with your diet over the last four weeks?

Why? Have you been too full?

Try less filling, more calorie-dense foods.

Try managing your food environment better and revisit your 'why'.

HOW TO MAKE MID-DIET ADJUSTMENTS WHEN BULKING

Has weight gain suddenly stalled?

Have your activity levels changed recently?

This might be due to water or gut content. Wait for a couple more weeks.

Has weight gain gradually slowed?

So, you're gaining weight faster than planned.
Is this still the case if you ignore the weight data two weeks since your last macro change?

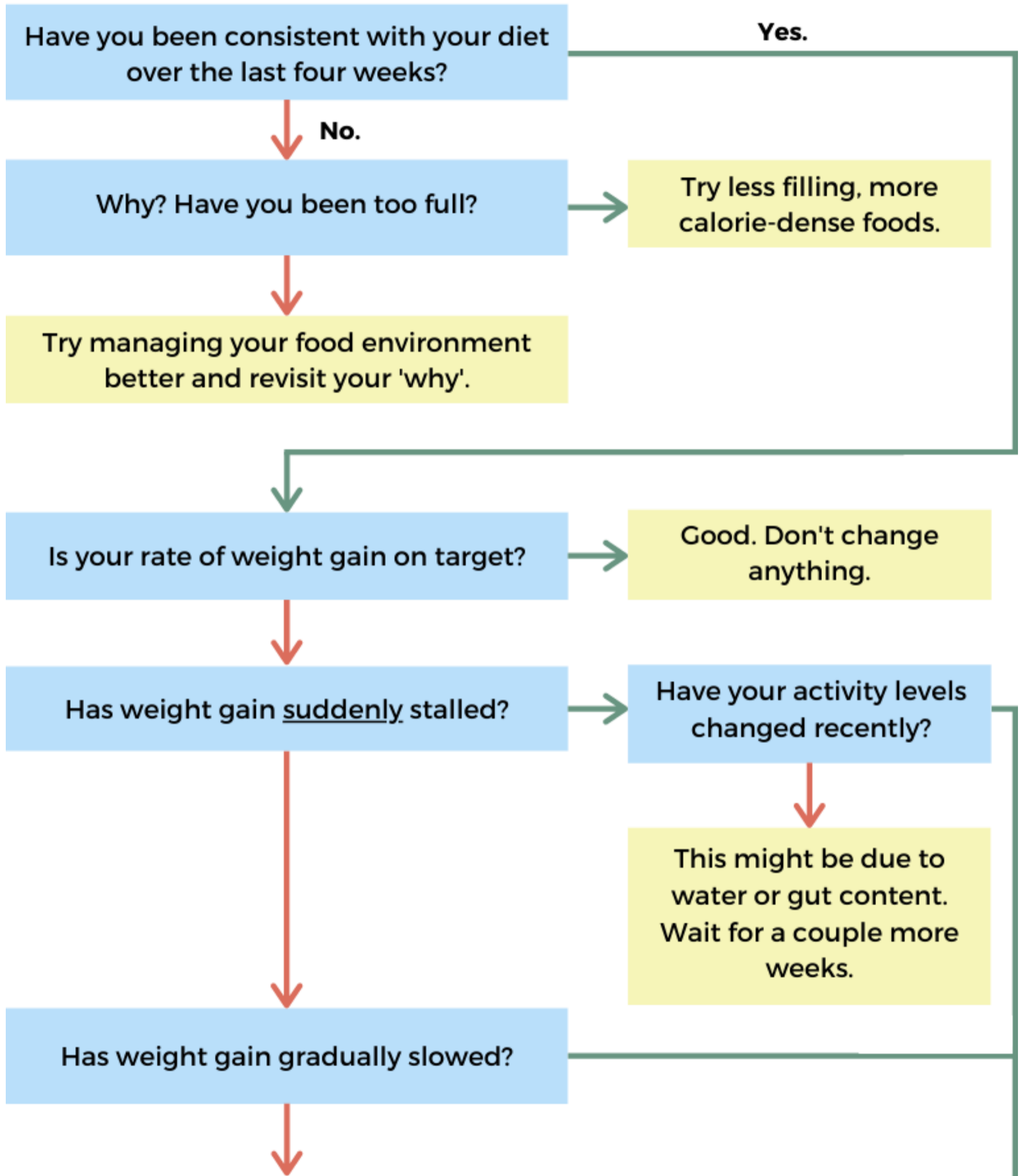
Don't change anything.

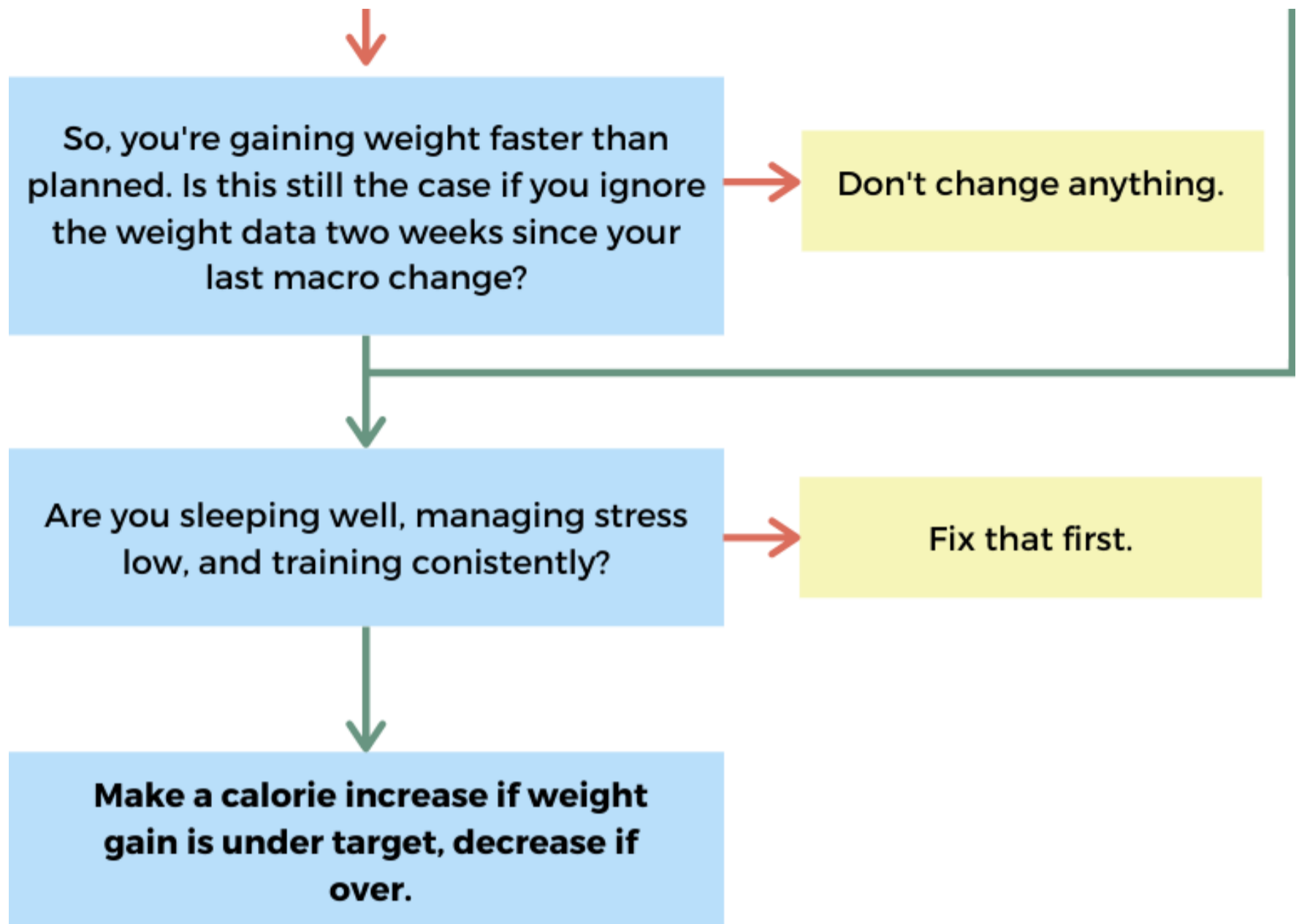
Are you sleeping well, managing stress low, and training consistently?

Fix that first.

Make a calorie increase.

Let's get straight to the flowchart:





NOTES ON THE BULKING ADJUSTMENTS FLOWCHART

- 1. You'll notice that a calorie increase is the last thing to consider.** This protects us against unnecessary fat gain, which is important for the reasons covered in the *Why We Care About Mid-Diet Adjustments* chapter.
- 2. If you've been feeling too full:**
 - ▶ Swap some of your whole food for liquid calories (without sacrificing your fruit and vegetable intake).

- ▶ If you're a slow eater, try to eat more quickly.
- ▶ Consider a [higher meal frequency](#) so that your meals aren't too large. If you have been skipping breakfast up until now, it might be worth adding it back in.

- 3. Manage your food environment** so that you have what you need in the house and with you at work.
- 4. "Revisit your why"** means to think about your motivations for doing this. Bulking can be especially tough for those who have a hard time gaining weight, and eating can become a chore. You have to make sure you sleep well, which means making an effort to go to bed earlier and sacrificing other activities.
- 5. Stress is the silent killer of gains and will cause you to gain more fat and less muscle than you should.** As when cutting, stress will impact recovery from your workouts, meaning that more of the weight you gain will be fat rather than muscle. Consider some strategies for managing it. Again, it is not my place to guide you on specifics, but I wrote my story of how I handled a particularly stressful period in my life [here](#).
- 6. Poor sleep will kill your gains and cause you to gain more fat and less muscle than you should.** Here's some [advice for getting a better night's sleep](#).
- 7. If your average daily activity levels have increased, you'll probably need to make a calorie increase.** However, I

recommend you wait to see the effect on your rate of weight gain rather than proactively try to adjust, because the calorie burn estimations of the apps can't be trusted. This is the rise in NEAT that I discussed in the *Why Adjustments Are Needed* chapter, which explains why some people have a harder time gaining weight than others. I don't recommend you purposefully limit your activity; just eat more.

MAKING AN ADJUSTMENT

Option 1: Repeat the calculation from the *How To Assess and Correct Your Initial Calculations* chapter.

This method can give a sense of false precision, as there will be noise in the data from changes not relating to muscle and fat, so I prefer to do the following...

Option 2: Increase overall energy intake by around 5%.

For most people, this will be a 150-200 kcal bump. To save you scrolling, here's the appropriate section from the table in the initial adjustments chapter.

Calorie change	More carbs (Recommended)	Even(ish) split	Fat only	Carbs only
~100 kcal	C: 25 g, F: 0 g	C: 15 g, F :5 g	10 g	25 g
~150 kcal	C: 25 g, F: 5 g	C: 15 g, F: 10 g	15 g	40 g

~200 kcal	C: 40 g, F: 5 g	C: 25 g, F: 10 g	20 g	50 g
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THINGS YOU WILL NOTICE AS YOU BULK

THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

The points here are of particular relevance to those who have just finished cutting and are transitioning to a bulk.

- ▶ **Your weight will come up much faster than you are targeting.** This is due to water, gut content, and glycogen replenishment. Don't panic. Be patient.
- ▶ **Your ab definition may blur due to a little water under the skin,** but it won't change as much as you'd expect, given the weight gain.
- ▶ **Expect a relatively large and sudden increase in the mid and lower-stomach measurements** (1.5-2.5 cm). This is not fat gain. You're eating more, so you have a higher gut content.
- ▶ **Expect a small increase in the chest/back and limb measurements.** This is due to the glycogen replenishment, not because you've suddenly gained a chunk of muscle tissue.
- ▶ **You may look most lean and jacked a couple of weeks in.** This is because you won't have gained much fat yet, and

you'll be glycogen replenished, so your muscles will look their biggest. Now is the time for a photoshoot if you're into that kinda thing.

- ▶ **Hunger will still likely be an issue. You'll feel like you can eat a lot more at mealtimes.** Your body will still fight you for a while in an attempt to pull you back to your previous "fatter" self. This will happen even though you are now eating more calories than maintenance. Your hormones are a little out of whack still, and your hunger cues cannot be relied upon to gauge whether you are eating a sufficient amount of calories.
- ▶ **Your libido will gradually start to return.** Loss of libido doesn't happen for all people, but in general, the leaner you got and the more prolonged the calorie deficit, the greater the effect and the longer it will take to return.
- ▶ **You may perform well in the gym initially, then experience a dip.** This is because you're eating more carbs which will fuel your workouts. However, resist the urge to ramp up the loads too quickly. Your body needs time to recover hormonally and start building muscle. If you feel great but then struggle for a few weeks, that would be natural. Don't panic.

AFTER THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

- ▶ **Your weight will continue to rise, but more slowly.** This is because the weight increases are now caused by fat and

muscle tissue increases, not water, gut content, and glycogen regain. You'll start to be able to estimate the rate of weight gain.

▶ **Fat regain will happen in the reverse order that you lost it.**

You'll notice this from the lower abs upward because that is where you last lost it. This sucks, but there is nothing we can do about it. You will gradually lose your ab definition as the bulk progresses.

▶ **Your stomach measurements will start to rise very slowly.**

This may only be clear when looking at 6–8 weeks of data. The inverse of what I said to be accurate about the stomach measurements when cutting applies: “As a rough guide, every 4–5 pounds of fat loss will show itself with a 2–2.5 cm (~1”) reduction on the stomach in two or more places.” If you cut before bulking, use your data points from that to give you a better estimate of how much fat you may be regaining. But make sure you discount the increases in the first couple of weeks due to gut content that I mentioned in the previous section.

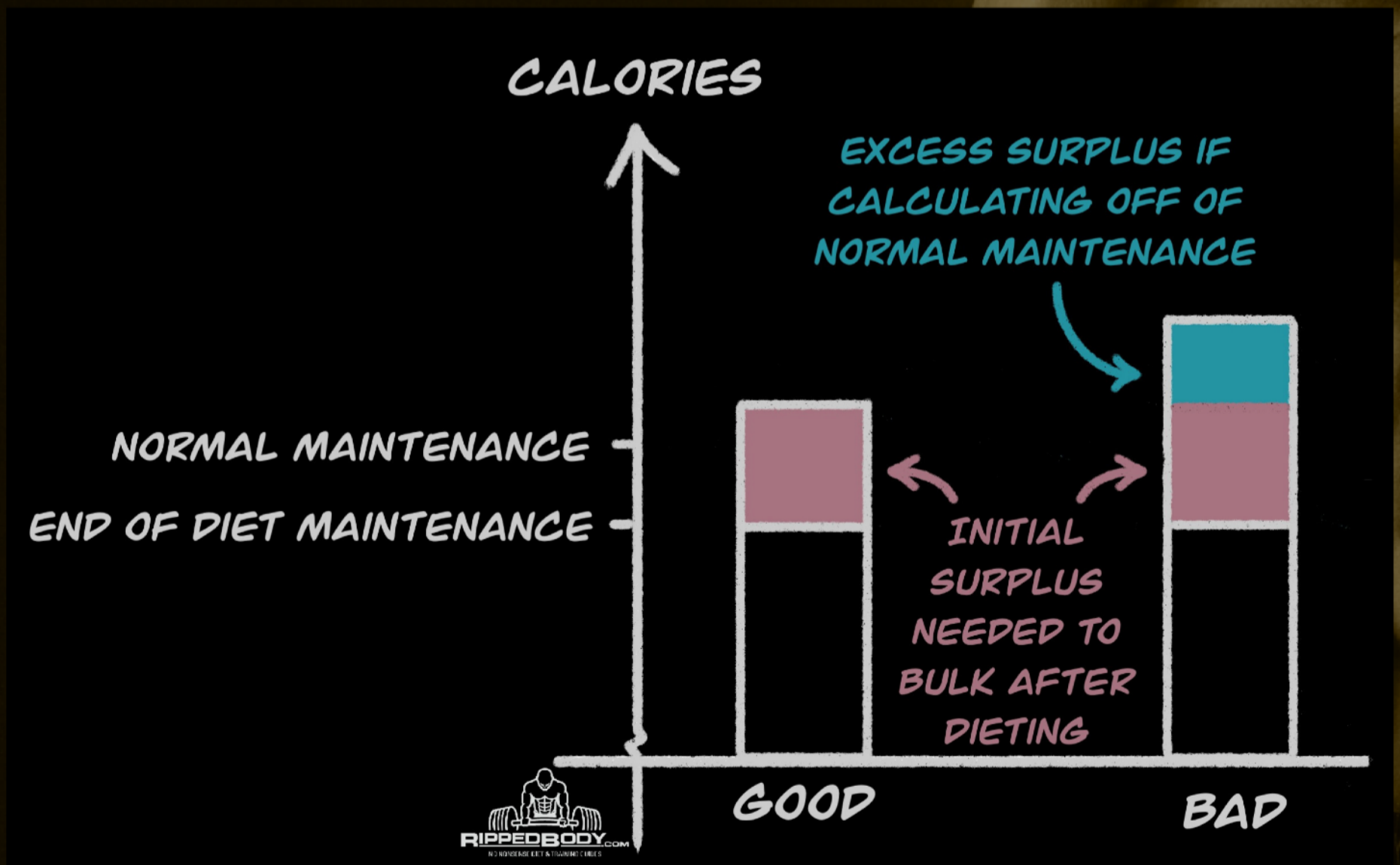
▶ **The increases in the chest and limb measurements will be difficult to perceive on a week-to-week basis.**

Muscle growth is slow and happens all over the body. Fat storage is concentrated in places like the stomach, so it's natural to notice this first. This catches people off guard. Don't take this to be a sign that you aren't doing things right.

- ▶ **There are no heuristics for how much your measurements *should* change.** Or rather, I have not observed a pattern obvious and consistent enough to determine if you are progressing to plan. So, though I know you want to hear me say something like, “Your chest-to-waist-to-arm measurements should increase in no more than a 3:2:1 ratio,” this is just fanciful. If you’re training hard, sleeping well, managing stress, and eating enough that you are gaining weight at an appropriate rate, you simply have to trust that it is working as best your genetics will allow.
- ▶ **You may feel that you look worse as you start to lose definition.** This is natural; try not to get down about it.
- ▶ **There will be a gradual shift away from hunger toward a feeling of constant fullness.** Eating can become a chore. This is your body trying to now stop you from gaining weight.
- ▶ **Performance in the gym will return to normal.** By “normal,” I mean as you’d expect for your experience level. More on this [here](#). Additionally, [here’s my guide covering how to progress](#), and [here’s my guide on how to break plateaus](#).

If you haven’t already got my training book, I’d highly recommend you pick up a copy as this is a critical component of bulking: [The Muscle and Strength Pyramid: Training](#).

A PRIMER ON TRANSITIONING BETWEEN DIET PHASES

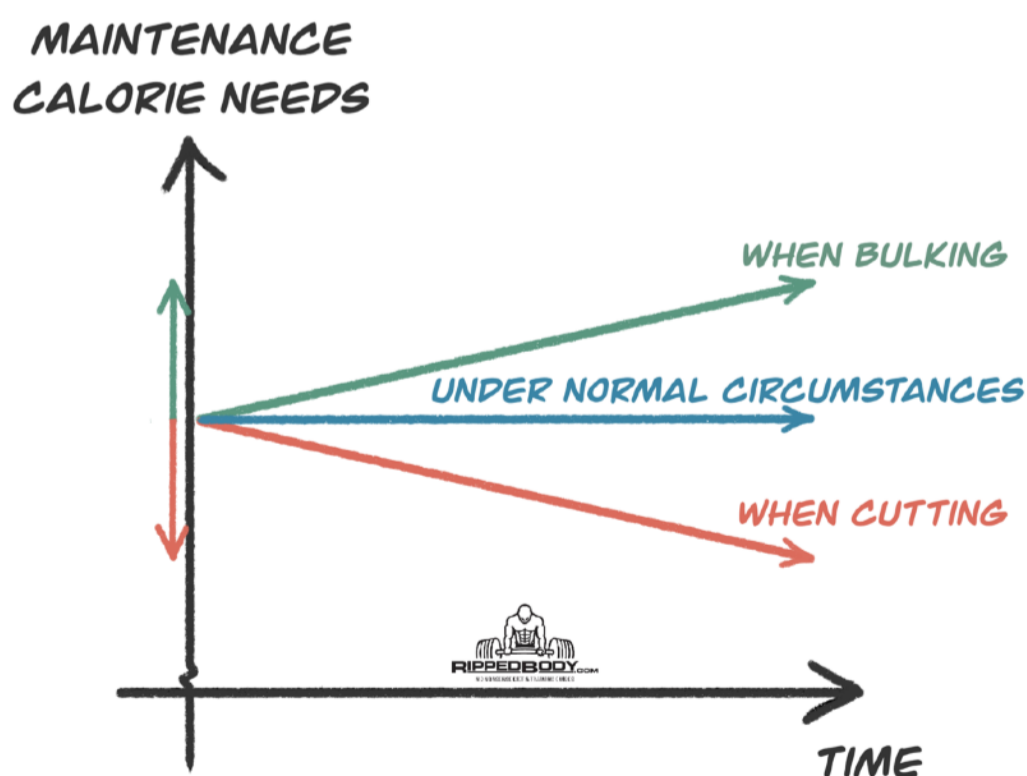


The transition period between cut and bulk phases is crucial to get right, but most people change their calorie intake by too much because they rely on a new calorie calculation instead of basing the changes on their own data.

The result is that diet phases are started with unnecessarily large deficits, risking hard-earned muscle losses; bulking phases are started with excessive calorie surpluses, costing us unnecessary fat regain.

AVOID USING A CALORIE CALCULATOR

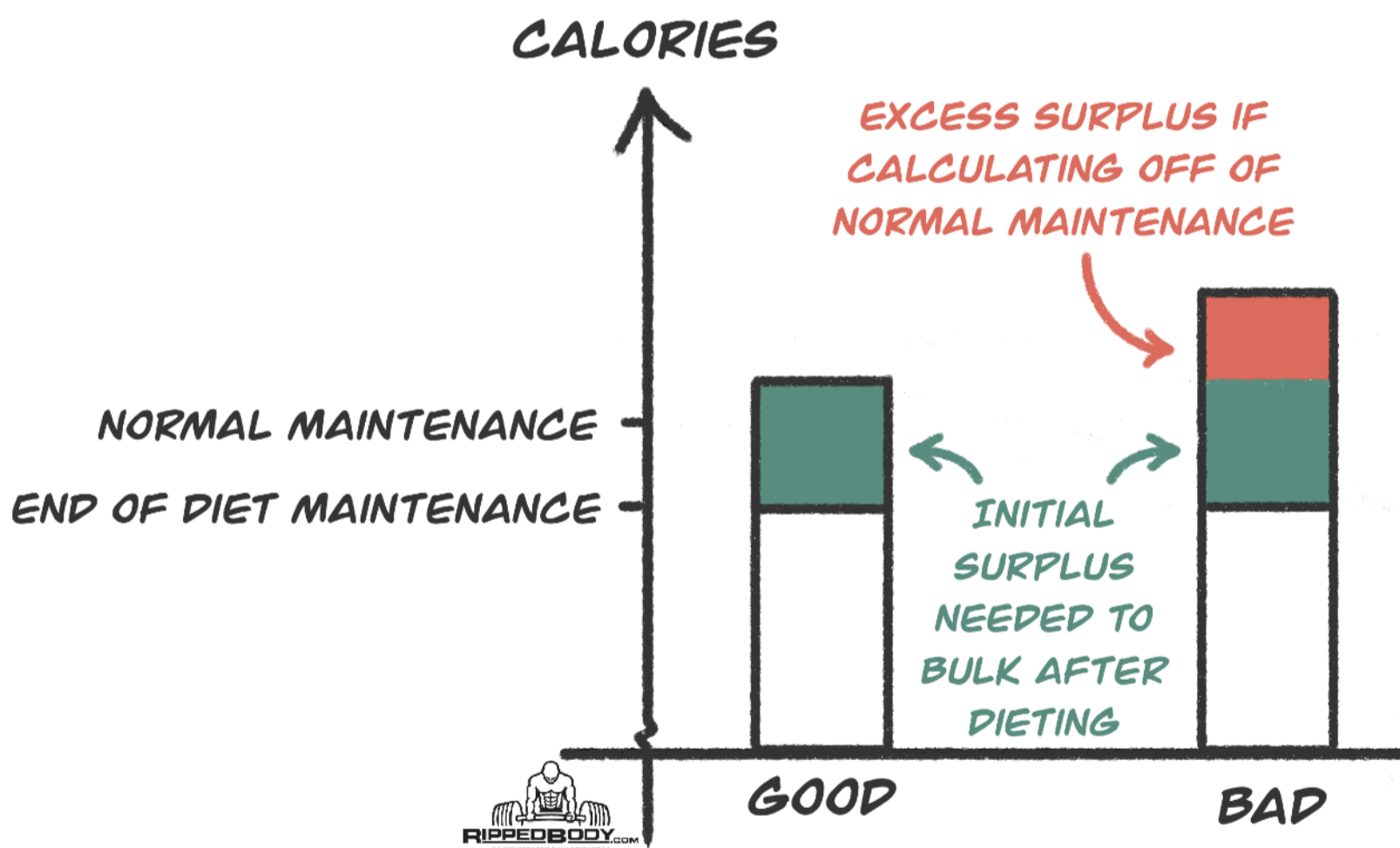
Recall from the *Why Adjustments Are Needed* chapter that our maintenance energy needs slowly change over time in reaction to a sustained calorie deficit or surplus.



How maintenance calorie needs change over time.

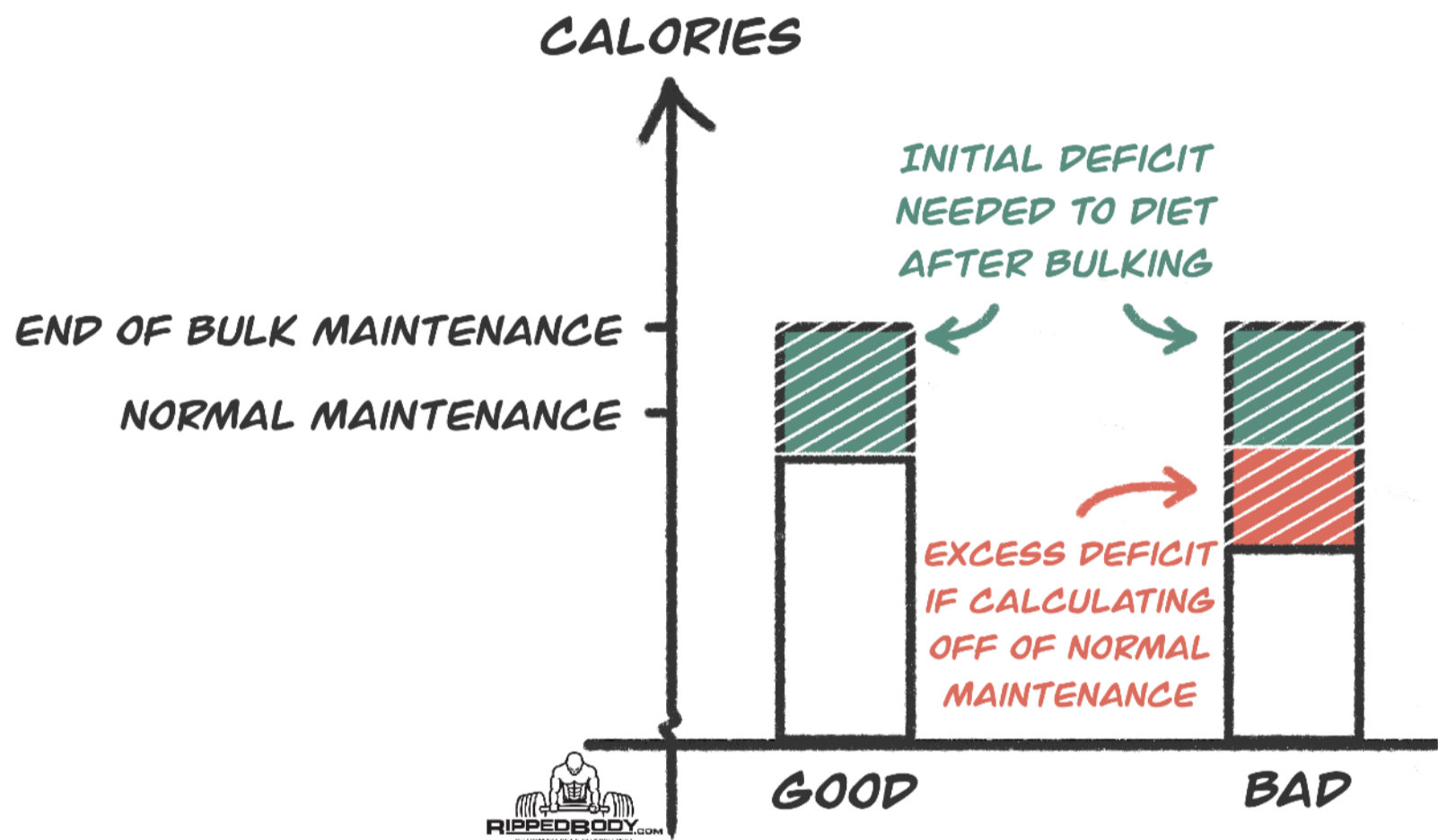
Part of this is because we are smaller or larger physically, with different energy needs, but part is due to *metabolic adaptation*.

A calorie calculator can't take this into account; it will assume normal maintenance circumstances. So if your metabolism is already suppressed from a long period of cutting and you jump straight to a bulk calculation, your calorie intake will be higher than necessary, you will gain weight too quickly, and an unnecessary amount of fat regain may happen.



Don't use a calorie calculator to estimate your calorie needs for a bulk after cutting. The calculator can't factor in metabolic adaptation and will assume normal maintenance, which will lead to a calorie excess (right). It's better to make a calculation based on your current, lower, end-of-diet maintenance point (left).

Similarly, if your metabolism is already ramped up from a long period of bulking and you jump straight into a cutting calculation, your calorie intake will be lower than necessary, and you may lose weight too quickly, which will put the hard-earned muscle you just gained at risk of loss.



Don't use a calculator to estimate your calorie needs for a cut after bulking. The calculator can't factor in metabolic adaptation and will assume normal maintenance, which will lead to an excess deficit (right). It's better to make a calculation based on your current, higher, end-of-bulk maintenance point (left).

TRANSITION BASED ON YOUR OWN DATA

The solution is to make calculations for calorie increases or decreases based on your own calorie intake and weight data.

This will take your current energy needs into account, rather than relying on estimations that will overshoot things.

There is no doubt that this is a more conservative approach, but if you have been struggling to see any progress after your cut and bulk phases, I would recommend it. Recall that the goal is to reduce time taken to reach your genetic potential. (Refer to the *Why We Care About Mid-diet Adjustments* chapter.)

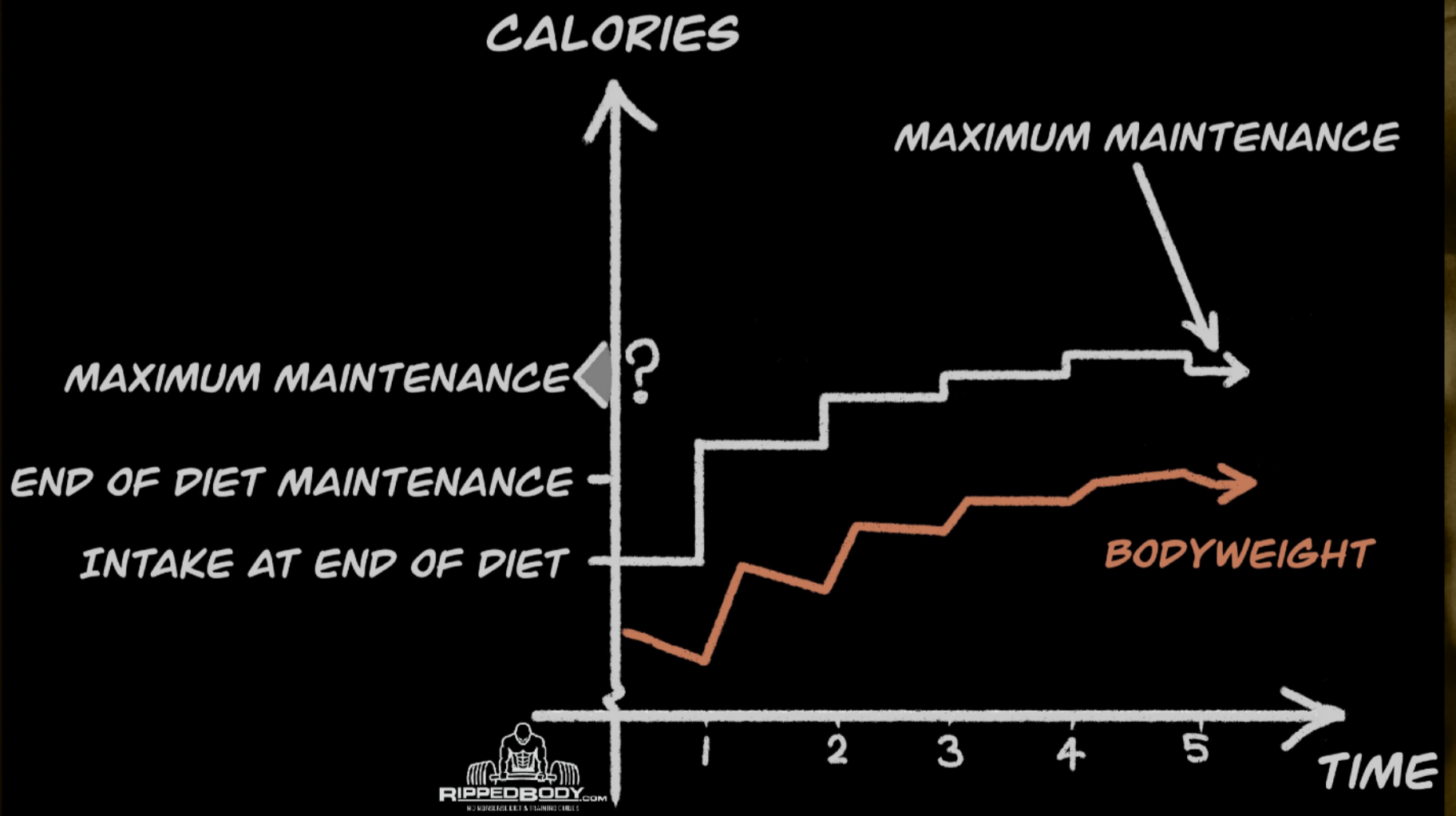
However, before transitioning from a cut to a bulk, or vice versa, I recommend that you spend two weeks at estimated maintenance.

Large and sudden changes in calorie intake can be a bit of a shock.

Fatigue can hit hard if you suddenly start eating nearly half the amount of food. Afternoon sleepiness can hit you hard when you're suddenly eating nearly double, and gastrointestinal distress (constipation, bloating, diarrhea, abdominal pain) isn't uncommon.

A short period at maintenance can lessen the impact, and I've found two weeks is the sweet spot. So, as we will all need to know how to find maintenance, that is what I'll explain in the next chapter.

TRANSITIONING TO MAINTENANCE



WHY TRANSITION TO MAINTENANCE

There are a number of reasons why you may want to find maintenance:

1. You're satisfied with your physique at the current time and want to end your cut or bulk phase.
2. A part-way step before transitioning to a cut or bulk phase.
3. You're a model, actor, physique, or weight-class competitor with a job or competition coming up, and you wish to maintain your weight or level of leanness.
4. You want to take a break for a while, perhaps due to a stressful period, extended vacation, illness, or injury.
5. You feel like total crap after restricting your calorie intake for so long and want to take a break until you're feeling normal again and ready to continue your diet.

HOW TO ESTIMATE MAINTENANCE

The calculation we can use to bring us to an estimation of momentary maintenance is relatively straightforward:

- ▶ Adjustment to find temporary maintenance \approx average weekly weight change in pounds \times 500 (1100 per kg)

But this is not a complete solution. Maintenance isn't static, which is why I refer to it as '*temporary*' maintenance. Your

metabolism will adapt to any calorie change, leaving you short of your target once again.

This is like a fox jumping after a rabbit. The fox can calculate the jump correctly, but by the time it lands, the rabbit has hopped away again.

It's impossible to know the extent of these adaptations, but we know they'll happen, so I suggest adjusting a little more than what we would otherwise calculate.

The heuristic I suggest we use is to add or subtract an additional number of calories equivalent to our weight in pounds. The calculation then becomes:

▶ ***Adjustment to find maintenance \approx average weekly weight change in pounds \times 500 + weight in pounds***

Here is the metric version:

▶ *Adjustment to find maintenance \approx average weekly weight change in kilograms \times 1100 + weight in kilograms \times 2.2*

EXAMPLE ESTIMATION OF MAINTENANCE AFTER CUTTING

Using this calculation, if you've been eating 1700 kcal, losing 0.75 lbs per week, and weigh 150 lbs, add 525 kcal. Your estimated maintenance is 2225 kcal.

(1700 + 0.75 \times 500 + 150)

Make this calorie increase from anywhere between $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{2}{3}$ carbs, with the rest from fats. You can achieve this by adding 75 g of carbs and 25 g of fats to your daily macros for the exact 525 calorie adjustment.

IF YOU HAVE BEEN PERFORMING CARDIO FOR FAT LOSS

If you have been performing cardio for fat loss, this would be a good time to reduce your cardio.

Let's say you had been performing four sessions per week and estimate, based on the calculations in the *How To Make Mid-diet Adjustments When Cutting* chapter, that they burn an average of 350 kcal per session. This is 1400 kcal per week, for an average of 200 kcal each day.

To continue the example, instead of adding in 525 calories each day and keeping the cardio, you could eliminate *two* sessions and increase calories by 425 each day, or eliminate *all four* sessions and increase calories by 325 each day.

EXAMPLE ESTIMATION OF MAINTENANCE AFTER BULKING

If you've been eating 3600 kcal, gaining 0.5 lbs per week, and weigh 200 lbs, subtract 450 kcal. Your estimated maintenance is 3150 kcal.

(3600 - 0.5x500 - 200)

Make this decrease from anywhere between $\frac{2}{3}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ carbs, with the rest from fats. You can achieve this by subtracting 80 g of carbs and 15 g of fats from your daily macros for a 455 kcal total adjustment.

HOW TO FIND 'MAXIMUM MAINTENANCE'

For those planning to move into to cut or bulk phase, *estimating* maintenance as we did in the previous section will suffice because in two weeks, you will change calories again anyway.

So, if you plan to transition to a cut or bulk phase, you can stop reading here and move onto the next relevant chapter.

However, if you are planning to stay around maintenance for a while, this may bring you short. Keep tracking the scale weight over the next few weeks and make adjustments as necessary.

EXAMPLE OF HOW TO FIND 'MAXIMUM MAINTENANCE' AFTER CUTTING

Let's say that 'week 0' represents the end of your diet, you added 525 kcal to estimate maintenance, and your weight data looks as follows:

Week 0	150 lbs
End of week 1 average	155 lbs

End of week 2 average	154.6 lbs
End of week 3 average	154.0 lbs

You can see that your weight increased from 150 lbs to 155 lbs in the first week and then drops by 0.4 lbs in week two and 0.6 lbs in week three. Ignoring the first week of data, you can see that you are still dropping approximately 0.5 lbs per week on average.

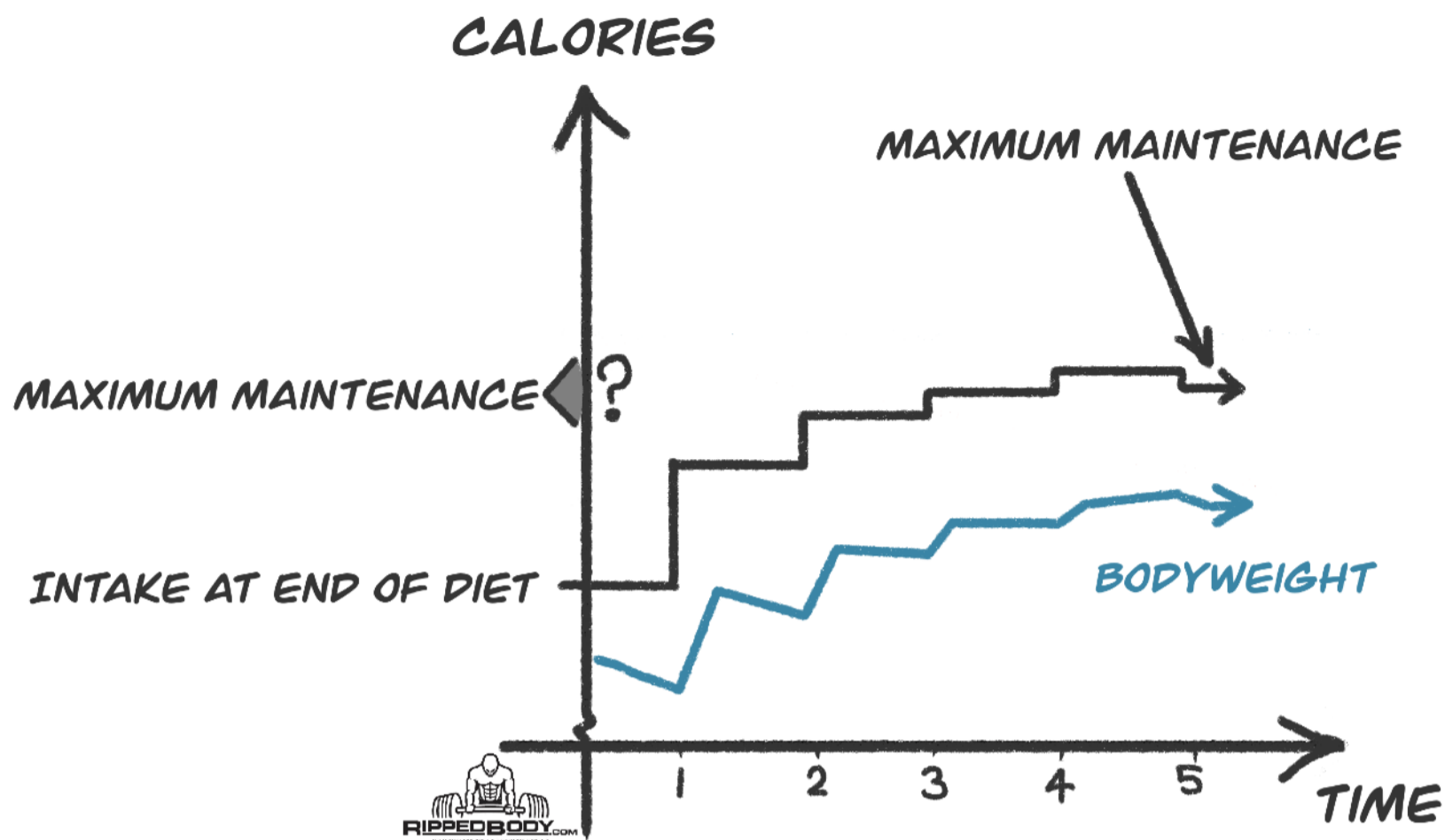
This suggests that you are still in a 250 kcal deficit. You could add that in, but it's likely that your metabolic rate will see a small bump once again, so I recommend adding 20% to that.

Therefore increase calorie intake by ~300 kcal per day. Here are two examples of macro changes to do that:

+50 g carbs, +10 g fats (290 kcal)

+40 g carbs, +15 g fats (295 kcal)

Wait another three weeks and repeat this process as many times as necessary. Here's how finding maximum maintenance after dieting might look:



How finding maximum maintenance after dieting may look in terms of calorie and bodyweight changes.

Allow me to explain each time point:

1. **The initial calorie increase of 525 kcal after dieting.** Your weight rises the first week after this but then continues to slowly fall in the weeks after because you are still short of maintenance.
2. **The second calorie increase, this time of 300 kcal.** Your weight rises again but then starts to fall, albeit much more slowly. You are still short of maintenance.
3. **You add 150 kcal to bridge the gap to maintenance.** Your weight rises in the first week and is then stationary.

4. **You add 150 kcal, curious to see if you can potentially bump calories a little further**, but this causes you to slowly gain weight.
5. **You remove the previous 150 kcal addition, concluding the previous calorie amount was the maximum you could maintain your weight on.** Your 'maximum maintenance' intake is 2675 calories per day. (1700 + 525 + 300 + 150)

RELATIVE ENERGY DEFICIENCY

It is possible to be at calorie maintenance, maintaining a stable body mass, but still feel terrible. If maintaining a certain level of leanness or weight results in:

- ▶ the loss of menses or an irregular menstrual cycle;
- ▶ persistent food focus;
- ▶ more frequent illness;
- ▶ poorer mood state;
- ▶ an inability to increase performance;
- ▶ loss of libido; or
- ▶ metabolic or reproductive hormone panels outside of the reference ranges,

you are likely still in a state of '[relative energy deficiency](#).' This is where reproductive and metabolic function are still being down-regulated to maintain energy balance.

If symptoms persist for a while even after diligently finding maximum maintenance, you probably need to push your calorie intake even higher. Yes, this may mean you have to settle for a higher body weight and possibly body-fat percentage.

These symptoms can often occur in physique competitors or weight-class restricted strength athletes in the process of dieting or if they attempt to maintain too lean of a physique after dieting. (More on this in the next chapter.)

THE REVERSE DIETING MYTH

I heard somewhere that after I have finished dieting, I should 'reverse diet' by adding 50-100 kcal per week. Is this incorrect?

Some people might consider the method I have outlined in the previous pages to be '*reverse dieting*.' I think this might be a fair description if considered in a vacuum, but unfortunately, '*reverse dieting*' is a term now commonly used to describe a very slow increase of calories after dieting, typically 50-100 kcal per week.

There is the belief that this minimizes fat regain and can help to build up the metabolism, making it possible to eventually eat

even more than you otherwise would while still maintaining weight.

This is just wishful thinking. It's a myth born from a misunderstanding of metabolic adaptation, sold to people who are terrified of weight regain after dieting because they confuse it for fat.

Yes, we want to minimize fat regain, and we want to find the maximum we can eat, but making slow increases like this just keeps us at a calorie deficit for far longer than necessary. This wastes time and makes things hard to sustain without any benefit.

In the example I gave above, where 'maximum' maintenance is found 950 kcal above the end-of-diet calorie intake, this would take 10-19 weeks with the reverse dieting method, which is just ridiculous.

So, if you come across the concept of reverse dieting online and it describes this method, I recommend you ignore it. Accept that you will gain weight after dieting, and don't confuse this for fat regain.

EXAMPLE OF HOW TO FIND 'MAXIMUM MAINTENANCE' AFTER BULKING

When transitioning from a bulk to maintenance, the process is just the opposite.

Let's say that 'week 0' represents the end of your bulk, you reduced 450 kcal to estimate maintenance, and your weight data looks as follows:

Week 0	200 lbs
End of week 1 average	198.0 lbs
End of week 2 average	198.3 lbs
End of week 3 average	198.6 lbs

You can see that your weight decreased from 200 lbs to 198 lbs in the first week, and then increases by 0.3 lbs in week two and 0.3 lbs in week three.

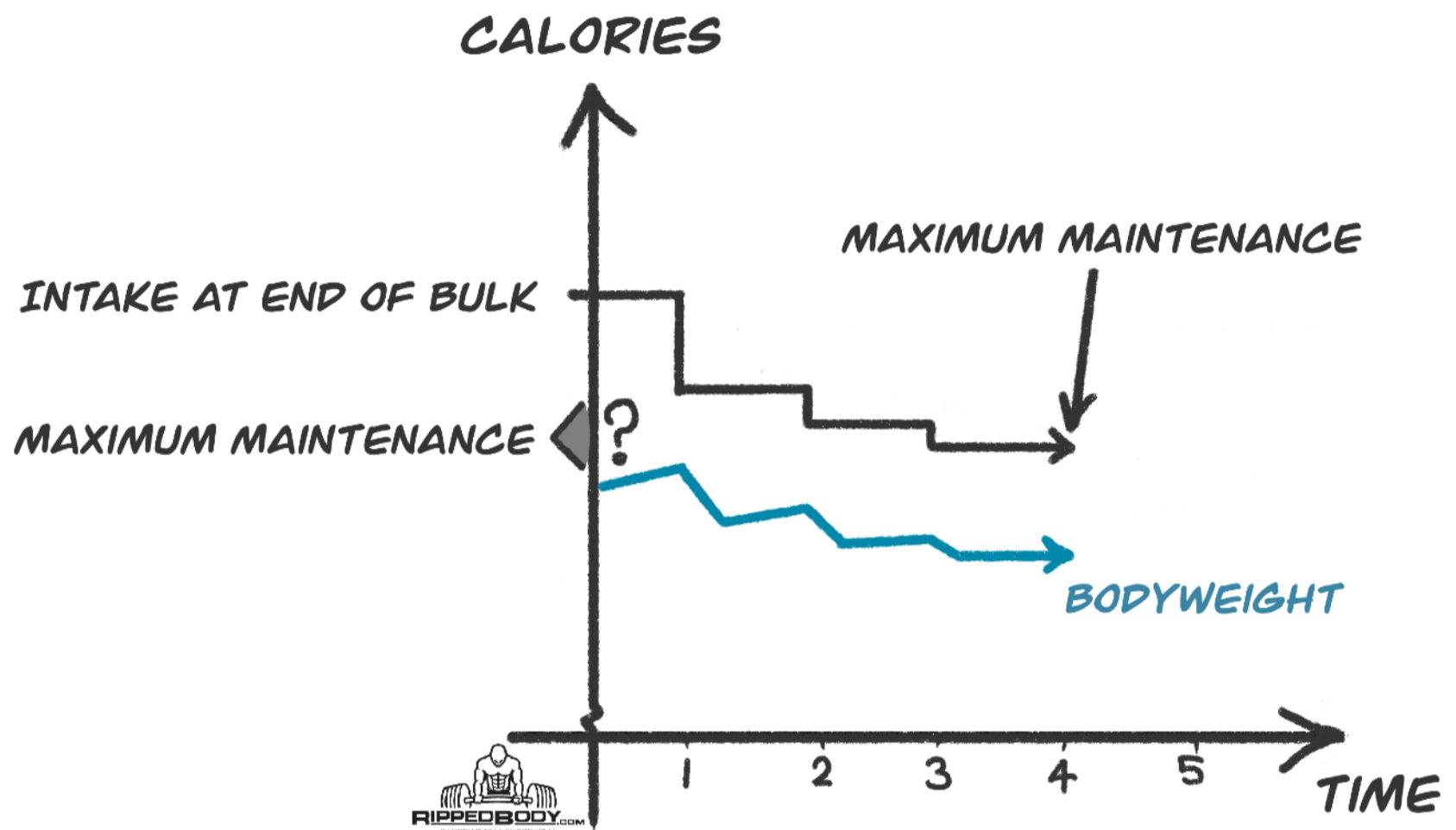
Ignoring the first week of data, you can see that you are still gaining approximately 0.3 lbs per week on average. This suggests that you are still in a 150 kcal surplus. You could add that in, but it's likely your metabolic rate will see a small drop once again, so I recommend subtracting an additional 20% from that.

Therefore reduce calorie intake by ~180 kcal per day. Here are two options to do that:

-45 g carbs (180 kcal)

-35 g carbs, -5 g fats (185 kcal)

Wait another three weeks and repeat this process as many times as necessary. Here's how finding maximum maintenance after bulking might look:



How finding maximum maintenance after bulking may look in terms of calorie and bodyweight changes.

Allow me to explain each time point:

1. **The initial calorie decrease of 450 kcal after bulking.** Your weight falls in the first week, then continues to rise in the weeks after because you are still above maintenance.
2. **The second calorie decrease, this time of 180 kcal.** Your weight falls again but then starts to rise, albeit much more slowly. You are still above maintenance.

3. **You subtract a modest 150 kcal to see if this will bring you to maintenance.** Your weight drops slightly in the first week and is then stationary for the following weeks.

4. **Your weight has been stable, so you don't make any change.** A further reduction is not necessary nor desirable. You've found your 'maximum maintenance' point at 2820 calories per day. (3600 - 450 - 180 - 150)

TRANSITIONING AFTER A PHYSIQUE CONTEST



This may shock some of you, but my advice to physique competitors after a contest is to get fat again.

I wish I could tell you that you could stay shredded all year, but you can't. Your priority needs to be regaining body fat to healthy levels before either trying to find maintenance or moving into a bulk phase.

So although the vast majority of my clients (and readers) do not compete, this short chapter is here to help explain why in the hope that you won't be confused when you see seemingly conflicting advice out there.



'Recreationally lean' (~11%) vs 'contest lean' (~6%). Photo courtesy of my colleague Dr. Eric Helms.

PHYSIQUE COMPETITORS NEED TO REGAIN BODY FAT TO HEALTHY LEVELS

When I talked about minimizing fat regain when transitioning to maintenance in the previous chapter, I was speaking to the majority of those reading this book, who will end their cutting phase somewhere around 10-11% body fat.

As a reminder, here's roughly how the lower body fat percentages look for recreational trainees:



'Recreationally lean' clients at the end of their cut phases. The 7-9% range (left) is significantly harder to sustain than 10-11% on the right.

As you can see in the client photos, this still looks shredded lean, but physique competitors need to get *significantly* leaner levels of body fat (4-6%) to stand a chance of winning, and there is a world of difference in the level of suffering someone has to go through to get there. Dieting is controlled starvation, but

bodybuilding prep is controlled starvation taken to the extreme. Your body will fight you with extreme hunger, fatigue, and (usually) complete loss of libido.

The majority of the differences between 'recreationally lean' and 'competitively lean' people aren't clear from shirtless front photos because the last fat comes predominantly from the legs, lower back, and bum.



'Contest-level lean.' — Alberto Nunez at 5-6% body fat.

This means two things:

1. Nobody accidentally diets themselves into contest conditioning.
2. The reward isn't worth the effort for those who don't plan on competing.

It's possible for some people to maintain 9–11% body fat for extended periods of time, even year-round, but it is not possible to maintain a stage-shredded 4–6% body fat for any length of time without health consequences.

So to be clear:

- ▶ **The goal of the recreational trainee**, after they have finished dieting is to **sustain their current level of leanness**, or **bulk while minimizing fat regain**.
- ▶ **But the goal of the physique competitor after a competition *must* be to first get back to a healthy level of body fat**. Only then should they consider maintenance or moving into a bulk while minimizing fat regain.

HOW TO REGAIN BODY FAT TO HEALTHY LEVELS

I recommend that you adopt the mindset that the contest prep ends when you are back to a healthy state, not when you step off the stage.

But how do you know when you're back at a healthy body fat range, given that we can't assess body-fat percentage accurately? It'll be once you've gained 5–10% of your body weight when the fat regain and increases in water, gut content, and glycogen are all considered.

- ▶ Aim to gain 5–10% of your stage weight in 4–8 weeks.

- ▶ If you gained more than 10% in 4 weeks and feel that the upward trend will continue, you might want to be a little more mindful of your intake.

It's hard to say what the best approach to this is. Should you continue to count calories or not?

You want to eat enough to get back to a healthy body fat range without binge eating. Ideally, you'll do this without needing specific calorie targets. But for many people, their internal hunger and fullness cues have been so disrupted that they're unable to control their intake without concrete targets to hit. If you know that you are going to be unable to control yourself without counting, use the calculations below:

1. After the contest, estimate your deficit based on your latest weight loss rates. Add it to your intake.
2. Add a calorie amount equivalent to your stage weight in pounds \times 5–8 (or stage weight in kg \times 10–16).

Use the lower end of the range if you were fairly lean before the diet. Use the higher end of the range if you had a fair amount of fat before the diet or you feel you are about to lose control after the contest.

Example: If you have been losing 0.75 lbs per week up until your competition, your stage weight is 150 lbs, and you dieted from 190 lbs (which can be considered a lot), add 1575 kcal.

$$(0.75 \times 500 + 150 \times 8)$$

If you were eating 1600 kcal/day at the end of your contest prep, this means you'll target 3175 kcal/day. Here's how to do it:

- ▶ Make the most of the healthy eating habits that you've developed through the dieting period by increasing the quantities of the foods you've been eating rather than changing your diet dramatically. You can certainly increase variety, and add some of your favorite foods, but do not let go of your eating habits entirely.
- ▶ If you find yourself bingeing, do not blame yourself. You're physiologically driven to eat, and that's natural. What is important is you do not let bingeing become a habit.
- ▶ At the end of weeks 4, 6 and 8, assess your body weight recovery, how you feel in terms of food focus, bingeing, mood swings, irritability, energy levels, and gym performance. If you experienced problems with any of these towards the end of the diet, they likely won't vanish the minute you step off the stage. Some may linger even after you've gained 10% of your stage weight but pay attention to whether they are improving.
- ▶ When you've gained 10% of your stage weight and/or you feel healthy enough in terms of the potential problems above, follow the instructions for the transition to a bulk (see the next chapter) or maintenance (see the previous chapter).

TRANSITIONING TO A BULK

BOB'S CALORIE AND MACRO ADJUSTMENTS (Transition to a bulk)

PHASE	End of Cut	Maintenance	Bulk	1st Adjustment
TIME	Week 0	Week 1	Week 3	Week 7
CALORIES	1700	2220	2555	2700
MACROS	P: 160 g C: 175 g F: 40 g	P: 160 g C: 260 g F: 60 g	P: 160 g C: 310 g F: 75 g	P: 160 g C: 335 g F: 80 g

THE STEPS TO TRANSITION TO A BULK

The transition from a diet to a bulk can be achieved in the following steps:

1. Estimate the calorie addition needed to approximate maintenance after cutting and add that to your daily intake.
2. Wait two weeks.
3. Calculate the calorie surplus needed to bulk at the rate you're targeting. Add that to your daily intake to commence your bulk.
4. Wait four weeks.
5. Make an adjustment, if necessary, to get yourself on track with your target rate of weight gain.

If you are transitioning to a bulk from maintenance, skip the first two steps.

CALCULATIONS TO TRANSITION TO A BULK

There are four pieces of information we need from earlier in the book to know how to transition. The first is an equation from the *Transitioning To Maintenance* chapter:

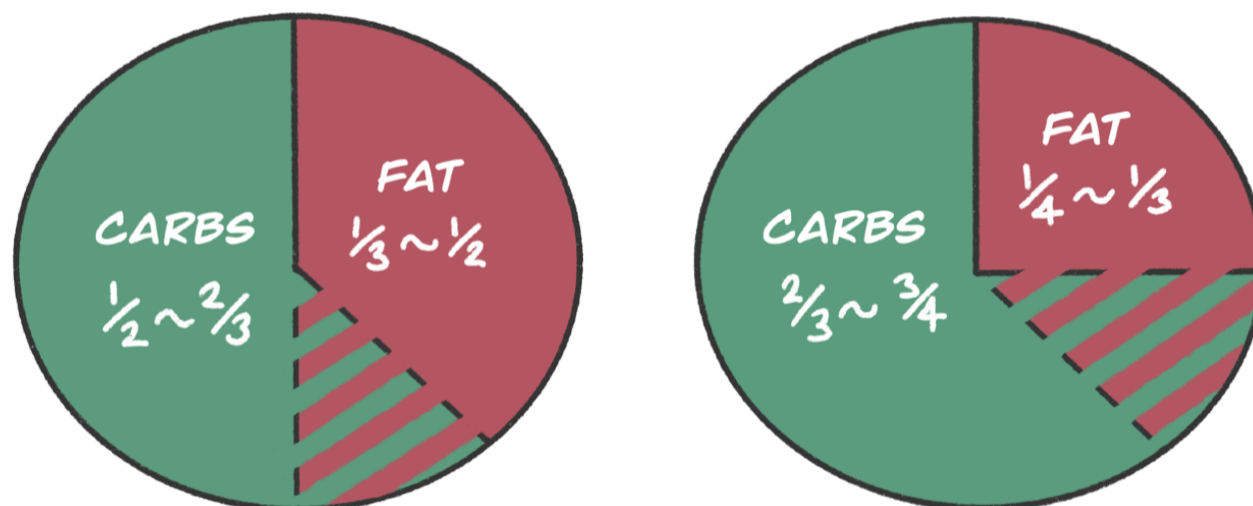
► ***Additional calories needed to approximate maintenance = average weekly weight change in pounds x 500 + weight***

in pounds (For metric users, change the last part to: “x 1100 + weight in kilograms x 2.2”.)

The second is an equation from the *Adjusting Initial Calculations When Bulking* section of the *How To Correct Your Initial Calculations* chapter:

► **To gain 1 lb of weight per month, add 150 kcal each day (330 kcal for 1 kg).**

The final thing is to know is how to adjust the macros to achieve these calorie changes.



If you recall the pie charts from the *How To Correct Your Initial Calculations* chapter, then you'll see the overlapping ratio from the bulk and cut phase adjustments is 2:1, so I'd recommend you keep it simple and shoot for that:

► **Make the calorie additions in a 2:1 ratio of carbs to fats.**

EXAMPLE TRANSITIONS TO A BULK

Bob weighs 150 lbs. The calorie intake at the end of his cut is 1700 kcal. He has been losing 0.75 lbs per week, and as he is an intermediate trainee, so he decides to target 1.5% of his body weight per month (2.25 lbs) when bulking.

1. Bob will first aim to increase his calorie intake by 525 kcal ($0.75 \times 500 + 150$). He adds 85 g of carbs and 20 g of fats to his daily macros, for a total increase of 520 kcal.
2. He'll wait two weeks.
3. Bob will then aim to increase his calorie intake by ~337.5 kcal (2.25×150) to commence his bulk. He adds 15 g of fat and 50 g of carbs to his daily macros for a total increase of 335 kcal.
4. He'll wait four weeks.
5. If Bob finds that he is gaining weight 1 lb per month short of his target, he'll aim to increase his calorie intake by 150 kcal per day. He can add 25 g of carbs and 5 g of fat for a total increase of 145 kcal.

Your transition to a bulking phase is now complete. From here, just follow the guidelines in the *How To Make Mid-diet Adjustments When Bulking* chapter to complete your bulk successfully. Once the bulk is done, follow the instructions in the *Transitioning To A Cut* chapter.

BOB'S CALORIE AND MACRO ADJUSTMENTS (Transition to a bulk)

PHASE	End of Cut	Maintenance	Bulk	1st Adjustment
TIME	Week 0	Week 1	Week 3	Week 7
CALORIES	1700	2220	2555	2700
MACROS	P: 160 g C: 175 g F: 40 g	P: 160 g C: 260 g F: 60 g	P: 160 g C: 310 g F: 75 g	P: 160 g C: 335 g F: 80 g

TRANSITIONING TO A CUT

TOM'S CALORIE AND MACRO ADJUSTMENTS (Transition to a cut)

PHASE	End of Bulk	Maintenance	Cut	1st Adjustment
TIME	Week 0	Week 1	Week 3	Week 7
CALORIES	3600	3150	2650	2400
MACROS	P: 180 g C: 495 g F: 100 g	P: 180 g C: 415 g F: 85 g	P: 180 g C: 335 g F: 65 g	P: 180 g C: 295 g F: 55 g

THE STEPS TO TRANSITION TO A CUT

The transition from a bulk to a cut can be achieved in the following steps:

1. Estimate the calorie reduction needed to approximate maintenance and subtract that from your daily intake.
2. Wait two weeks.
3. Calculate the calorie deficit needed to cut at the rate you're targeting. Subtract that from your daily intake to commence your cut.
4. Wait four weeks.
5. Make an adjustment, if necessary, to get yourself on track with your target rate of weight loss.

If you are transitioning to a cut from maintenance, skip the first two steps.

CALCULATIONS TO TRANSITION TO A CUT

As with the *Transitioning To A Bulk* chapter, there are three things we need from earlier in the book to know how to transition:

- ▶ ***Reduction of calories needed to approximate maintenance = average weekly weight change in pounds***

$x 500 + \text{weight in pounds}$ (For metric users, change the last part to: " $x 1100 + \text{weight in kilograms} \times 2.2$ ".)

- ▶ **To lose 1 lb of weight per week, subtract 500 kcal each day (550 kcal for 0.5 kg).**
- ▶ **Make the calorie subtractions in a 2:1 ratio of carbs to fats.**

EXAMPLE TRANSITION TO A CUT

Tom weighs 200 lbs. The calorie intake at the end of his bulk is 3600 kcal. He has been gaining 0.5 lbs per week and wishes to target 0.5% of his body weight per week (1 lb) when cutting.

1. Tom will first reduce his calorie intake by 450 kcal ($0.5 \times 500 + 200$). He'll do this by subtracting 80 g of carbs and 15 g of fats from his daily macros.
2. He'll wait two weeks.
3. Tom will then reduce his calorie intake by 500 kcal (1×500) to commence his cut. He'll do this by subtracting an additional 20 g of fat and 80 g of carbs from his daily macros.
4. He'll wait four weeks.
5. If Tom finds that he is losing weight 0.5 lbs per week short of his target, he'll reduce his calorie intake by an additional 250

kcal per day. He does this by reducing carbs by 40 g and fat by 10 g.

Your transition to a cutting phase is now complete. From here, just follow the guidelines in the *How To Make Mid-diet Adjustments When Cutting* chapter to complete your cut successfully. Once the cut is done, follow the instructions in the *Transitioning to Maintenance* or *Transitioning To A Bulk* chapters, based on your goal.

TOM'S CALORIE AND MACRO ADJUSTMENTS (Transition to a cut)				
PHASE	End of Bulk	Maintenance	Cut	1st Adjustment
TIME	Week 0	Week 1	Week 3	Week 7
CALORIES	3600	3150	2650	2400
MACROS	P: 180 g C: 495 g F: 100 g	P: 180 g C: 415 g F: 85 g	P: 180 g C: 335 g F: 65 g	P: 180 g C: 295 g F: 55 g

CLIENT EXAMPLES



This section brings all the theory and concepts discussed in the previous chapters to life with real client examples. I will take you through the macros used, how their progress data looked, and all the decisions along the way.

SOME IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT THESE CLIENT EXAMPLES

1. I have ten years of experience setting initial macros for people. I'm very good at it, but you may need to adjust your macros sooner than you see in these client examples. I'd also note that, quite honestly, I haven't done this by calculator in years – at this point, the numbers simply pop into my head.
2. You will see that all of these clients cycled their macros. As mentioned earlier in the book, this is for diet variety and preference, not because there is sufficient reason to believe this leads to better results over a diet with the same macros each day (if it is equally well adhered to). So, if you don't wish to cycle your macros, please don't feel pressured to do so!
3. There is a lot you can learn from hearing the clients' stories in their own words. For this reason, I have included comments from each, both before and after the coaching. You will read recurring themes of them discovering the importance of patience, tracking, and objective decision-making.

4. They are all family men with busy careers. They aren't people with tons of time to dedicate to this stuff.
5. A few readers asked me to feature some older clients, but I have seen absolutely no difference in how this book's nutrition principles play out with age. None. Therefore, I have chosen the clients who best showed this book's principles in action and ignored age.
6. I have referred to the type of training program used briefly, but this is not a book about training decisions, so I have not gone into detail. To learn more about my thoughts on choosing or building a training program and progressing with it, see the free [training articles](#) on the site. Nothing I did with these clients deviates from that. When you're ready for more detail, consider our [Muscle and Strength Pyramid: Training](#) book.
7. I have put the links to my video explanations at end of each client's section.

The one thing I want you to take away from this section is that things can often be straightforward. However, when they don't go to plan, that's when the decision-making frameworks discussed earlier in the book will be indispensable in guiding you.

Here we go!

KLINT'S 6-MONTH CUT



Age: (didn't ask), **Height:** 5'7 (170 cm),
Weight: 161.2 → 140.4 lbs (73.3 → 63.8 kg),
Stomach: 33.2" → 27.9" (84.4 → 70.8 cm)

[I have uploaded Klint's spreadsheet data here.](#)

KLINT'S COMMENT BEFORE WORKING TOGETHER

"I have tried getting lean many times in my life and have never been able to get where I want. It frustrates me, and I would like to prove to myself that it is possible. I pay too much attention to the scale and start feeling small. I get afraid that I am losing it all in order to get ripped."

COACHING EXPLANATION

I worked with Klint for six months. He is a powerlifter, but with no competitions on the horizon, he decided he wanted to chase getting shredded-lean for the first time in earnest, without having to worry if his lifting numbers went down.

We trained five days per week, a more bodybuilding style of training rather than his usual lower-rep powerlifting style, similar to the [Intermediate Bodybuilding Program](#).

As mentioned in the *How To Make Mid-diet Adjustments* chapter, sometimes people get weaker as they cut. This is especially true for experienced lifters who may already be lifting as much as their current muscle mass level will allow for. There is a mechanical inefficiency to getting leaner, and with experienced lifters, weight changes can lead to small changes in a technique that they have spent years honing, which can throw them off.

In Klint's case, his lifting did exceptionally well. I consider this to be luck rather than my coaching skill because it is the exception to the norm:

"I wasn't feeling my workout yesterday, so I broke the plan and hit maxes on everything. I weighed in at 137 and hit 395 on the squat, 295 on the bench, and 455 on the deadlift. Not my best numbers ever, but for dieting 25 weeks and not prepping for a meet, I was pretty happy."

We agreed to target ~1.25 pounds per week of fat loss initially (0.55 kg), which was ~0.75% of body weight. Given Klint's level of training advancement, I wasn't expecting any muscle gain and could use weight loss as a reliable indicator of fat loss.

	Week 0	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Weight	161.2	160	158.9	158.2	156.7	155	153.8	152.6	151.8	150.9	149.6
Chest	109	108.5	108.5	108.9	108.8	108.4	108.5	108.8	108.6	108.5	108.6
R arm	38.9	38	37.8	37.8	37.6	37.8	37.5	37.2	37.5	37.3	37.1
L arm	38.3	38	37.7	38	37.7	38	37.7	37.5	37.6	37.6	37.5
2" above	83.7	81.6	81	80	79.5	78.2	77.7	77	77	76.5	75.9
Belly	84.4	82.7	82.5	82.1	81	80.1	79.6	79	78.8	79	78.9
2" below	85.7	84.1	84.1	83	82.1	81	80.7	79.3	79.3	79	78.8
Hips*	95.1	92.6	92.6	91.6	90.9	90.5	90	89.9	89.8	89.5	89.3
R thigh	58.1	58	58.3	58	57.6	57.6	57.4	57.3	57.1	57.1	56.9
L thigh	57	56.2	56.5	57.3	57.1	56.9	56.7	56.7	56.2	56.9	56.9
Target	-1.25 lbs / wk										
Training 5x Day Macros	P:160 C:210 F:50										
Rest 2x Macros	P:160 C:110 F:65										
	Start Cut										
Calorie Total Adherence		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Training Adherence		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	90%	100%	99%	100%	100%
Sleep issues? (0-5)		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Stress issues? (0-5)		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hunger issues? (0-5)		0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fatigue? (0-5)		2	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1

(The red and blue boxes correspond to the text with matching colors below.)

In the first ten weeks, we lost 11.7 pounds (5.3 kg), which was right on target. Weight loss from week to week was not linear, but the scale weight consistently trended down. The kind of fluctuations you see here are typical when adherence is on point, but this level of diet adherence is atypical, as you'll see in the coming client examples.

There was **no sudden drop in weight at the start**; Klint had been dieting previously, so carb intake, water, and gut content levels weren't much different. The **initial drop in stomach measurements** of ~1.5–2 cm from the start to the end of week one are something I regularly see and usually ignore. Though I used to think the primary explanation was gut content losses from eating less food, I've now seen it consistently enough to realize that people measure a little tighter after the start. — It's human nature to want to see progress.

Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12	Week 13
151.8	150.9	149.6	149	148	146.8
108.6	108.5	108.6	108.5	108.6	108.5
37.5	37.3	37.1	37.1	37	36.8
37.6	37.6	37.5	37.5	37.3	37.4
77	76.5	75.9	75.7	75.7	74.7
78.8	79	78.9	77.5	76.9	76.1
79.3	79	78.8	77.9	77.7	77.3
89.8	89.5	89.3	89	88.7	88.4
57.1	57.1	56.9	56.9	56.4	56.2
56.2	56.9	56.9	56.5	56	55.6
					P:160 C:180 F:45
					P:160 C:85 F:60
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
99%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
1	1	1	1	1	1
0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	2
1	1	1	1	0	1

I made a modest macro adjustment (~160 kcal total) at the start of week 13, because **weight loss appeared to be slowing**, and he was showing **no signs of hunger or fatigue issues**.

	Week 0		Week 13
Tday Macros	P:160 C:210 F:50	→	P:160 C:180 F:45
R-day Macros	P:160 C:110 F:65	→	P:160 C:85 F:60
	Start of cut		

Week 14	Week 15	Week 16	Week 17	Week 18	Week 19	Week 20	Week 21	Week 22	Week 23	Week 24	Week 25	Week 26
145.3	144.5	143.9	143	142.9	141.8	139.7	138.2	138.7	138.6	138	139.2	140.4
108.3	108.3	107.9	108.4	108.5	108.5	108.2	107.8	108.2	108	108.4	107.5	107.8
36.9	37	37	36.8	36.8	36.5	36.5	36.3	36.6	36.5	36.3	36.1	36.4
37.1	37	37	37	36.9	36.9	36.5	36.4	36.6	36.7	36.5	36.3	36.8
74.4	73.2	73	73.7	73.5	72.5	71.8	71.6	70.8	70.6	70.5	69.6	70
75.1	74.2	74	74.1	72.8	73.4	73	72.6	72.3	72	72	70.5	70.8
77.1	75.3	75.3	77	74.2	74	73.8	73.4	73.2	73	72.8	72.5	73
88.3	87.7	87.6	87.7	87	85.4	85.5	85.5	85.3	85.1	84.9	84.7	85.2
56.3	56.3	56	55.5	55.5	54.1	54	53.5	54	54	54	53.1	54
56	56.1	55	54.5	54.6	53.3	53.5	53	53.3	53.7	53.1	52.6	53.5
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0

You can see that progress was fairly linear once again until week 20 when some crazy shit started to happen with the scale weight.

There was a 2.1-pound loss in week 20, a 1.5-pound loss in week 21, a 0.5-pound increase in week 22, almost no loss in week 23, a drop of just 0.6 pounds in week 24 then an inexplicable rise of 1.2 pounds in both weeks 25 and 26.

This is exceptionally uncommon, but I wasn't worried, nor did I feel pressured to change anything.

Why?

Though I haven't seen his birth certificate, I'm pretty sure his middle name is "Captain Adherence." That is to say, I was confident Klint hadn't suddenly started misreporting his calorie intake, and as his activity levels hadn't changed, I knew this must be due to some weird water fluctuations.

At that point, we were pretty much done with the cut anyway and could have ended it there. However, Klint's stomach measurements continued to decline slowly, he was seeing improvements visually, and most importantly, he was feeling good (note the low hunger and fatigue levels) and happy to press on. By week 26, Klint was satisfied with his appearance, and we decided to end the coaching there.

	Week 0	Week 26
Weight	161.2	140.4
Chest	109	107.8
R arm	38.9	36.4
L arm	38.3	36.8
2" above	83.7	70
Belly	84.4	70.8
2" below	85.7	73
Hips*	95.1	85.2
R thigh	58.1	54
L thigh	57	53.5
Target		
Training 5x Day Macros	P:160 C:210 F:50	P:160 C:180 F:45
Rest 2x Macros	P:160 C:110 F:65	P:160 C:85 F:60
	Start Cut	End Cut

In total, Klint lost 20.8 lbs (9.5 kg) and took 5.3" (13.6 cm) off his stomach. Notice that his arms lost around 1.5 cm, his legs lost about 3.5–4 cm. This is what I would expect of the fat loss in these places and does not indicate muscle loss.

His chest measurement lost less than expected (just 1.2 cm). This may be because of some muscle growth on the chest and back, but it's also possible that he subconsciously flared his lats harder or held more breath in his chest as the weeks went by. If you lose more than this in your chest measurement for the same amount of fat loss, don't be surprised.

KLINT'S COMMENT AFTER COACHING

"The most valuable lesson I learned was patience and consistency. Every time I've tried cutting on my own, I make changes too quickly because I always try to lose too much too fast. I learned it takes time to get lean if you want to hang on to your muscle and strength.

"Being a competitive powerlifter, I was concerned that I would have to do higher reps or cardio to get this lean. Instead, I kept my strength very high. (Bench stayed over 2x BW and I was repping the deadlift with over 3x BW.) I was very surprised by that.

"Learning how to track properly was also a big lesson for me. It seems so obvious now, but I had never thought about all the measurements or averaging my weight for the week.

“I was glad that you didn’t push me into intermittent fasting or some other form of named ‘diet.’ It was nice that you listen to your clients and take their opinions into consideration.

“I also learned that coaching isn’t always about telling someone exactly what to do at all times. It was the accountability of having a coach that made me make the most progress. I was investing time and money into my goals. I wasn’t going to cheat on my diet or cheat myself when I had to report back to a coach every two weeks.

“I gained a lot of confidence moving forward that I can keep up with cutting and bulking the right way. Also, having your site to use as a reference is great!”

[Here is Klint's data analysis and coaching decision video.](#)

Password: coachingmanual

DAVE'S 7.5-MONTH CUT AND 7-MONTH BULK



Age: 39, **Height:** 6'1 (185 cm),
Weight: 182.2 → 160.0 → 174.6 lbs (82.8 → 72.7 → 79.4 kg),
Stomach: 35.5" → 29.7" → 30.6" (90.2 → 75.5 → 77.6 cm)

[I have uploaded Dave's spreadsheet data here.](#)

DAVE'S COMMENT BEFORE WORKING TOGETHER

"I want to look and feel athletic well into my 'old age.' Ideally, I'd like to be more muscular with less body fat, so it's obvious to others that I work out. For as long as I can remember, I've had love handles and found it very difficult to gain muscle without putting serious weight to my midsection. I'd like to figure out how to change that pattern long-term.

“I want to feel comfortable at the beach/pool, with or without a shirt. I don't want the dad bod that so many dads (myself included) have. I also have never really been able to figure out what works for me. I've worked out for a long time and continue to do so consistently. I try to study nutrition and eat the best I know how, but I never seem to get that ‘athletic’ looking body. It's always been a goal of mine, and I'd like to finally achieve it.”

COACHING EXPLANATION – THE CUT

Dave is another man with stellar consistency. We decided to cut first and then bulk. I suggested that we target 1.0–1.25 pounds per week of fat loss initially (~0.5 kg), which is ~0.6% of body weight. We trained four days per week, with an *upper, lower, upper, lower* split.

	Week 0	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
Weight	182.2	180.8	178.8	178.4	177.3	?
Chest	106.0	105.3	103.7	105.3	106.0	105.8
R arm	39.2	39.3	39.1	38.6	38.8	38.8
L arm	39.4	39.1	39.2	38.7	39.0	38.8
2" above	85.1	84.9	83.7	81.7	81.7	79.0
Belly	90.2	88.3	86.5	85.5	85.7	85.5
2" below	90.2	89.5	88.2	87.5	88.0	88.0
Hips*	98.1	96.5	94.5	92.5	91.5	91.0
R thigh	60.0	59.0	59.7	60.5	59.5	59.2
L thigh	59.7	59.3	59.5	60.2	59.0	60.0
Target	-1.0-1.25lbs /wk					
Training 4x Day Macros	P:180 C:255 F:45					P:180 C:230 F:40
Rest 3x Macros	P:180 C:110 F:75					P:180 C:85 F:70
	Start Cut					
Calorie Total Adherence		100%	100%	100	100	110
Training Adherence		100%	100%	100	100	100
Sleep issues? (0-5)		0	1	0	0	0
Stress issues? (0-5)		1	1	1	1	0
Hunger issues? (0-5)		1	1	1	1	0
Fatigue/lethargy? (0-5)		0	0	0	0	0

You can see a drop of 1.4 and 2.0 pounds in the first two weeks, but then 0.4 and 0.9 pounds of weight loss in the following two weeks. At the four-week update point, I concluded that as the weight loss was skewed toward the first two weeks, of the 4.9 pounds lost, a little of that was likely due to gut content, water, and glycogen losses. As Dave had no issues with fatigue, hunger, sleep, or stress, we agreed to make a modest calorie reduction (~150 kcal). I knew this would be good for an additional ~1/3 of a pound of fat loss per week, which I believed should put us on target.

	Week 0		Week 5
Tday Macros	P:160 C:255 F:45	→	P:160 C:230 F:40
R-day Macros	P:160 C:110 F:75	→	P:160 C:85 F:70
	Start of cut		

Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12	Week 13	Week 14	Week 15
?	176.3	175.0	173.9	172.7	172.4	172.1	171.3	170.9	170.4	169.5
105.8	105.3	105.0	105.0	105.5	104.5	105.5	105.5	105.2	106.0	105.5
38.8	38.7	39.0	39.4	38.7	38.3	38.4	38.6	38.4	38.7	38.3
38.8	38.7	38.5	38.5	38.4	38.3	38.4	38.5	38.4	38.2	38.3
79.0	76.5	76.5	76.5	76.0	75.9	74.0	74.2	74.0	73.5	72.5
85.5	84.5	84.0	83.5	83.5	83.5	82.5	82.0	82.0	81.0	81.0
88.0	87.5	87.6	86.5	85.5	85.4	85.0	84.5	84.5	85.0	84.0
91.0	90.7	90.5	90.0	89.7	88.5	89.0	87.0	87.5	87.5	87.5
59.2	59.8	59.5	59.0	59.0	59.3	59.2	59.2	59.2	59.2	59.0
60.0	59.7	59.6	59.0	59.0	59.4	59.0	59.6	59.2	59.0	59.0
P:180 C:230 F:40										P:160 C:205 F:40
P:180 C:85 F:70										P:160 C:70 F:60
110	100	100	100	100	105	100	100	100	100	100
100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
0	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0
0	1	2	2	2	3	1	1	0	0	0
0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
0	0	0	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	0

For the next four weeks (5-9), weight loss was pretty linear, but over weeks 10-14, things seemed to slow again. Dave had dropped 2.5 cm off the mid and upper-stomach measurements in those weeks, which is what I would expect if we were on target. However, when looking back to consider the four weeks prior as well, Dave had only dropped 3-3.5 cm in the previous eight weeks in total (6-14). So, I decided to reduce calorie intake by 100 kcal and 150 kcal on the training and rest days, respectively.

	Week 5		Week 15
Tday Macros	P:160 C:230 F:40	→	P:160 C:205 F:40
R-day Macros	P:160 C:85 F:70	→	P:160 C:70 F:60

Week 14	Week 15	Week 16	Week 17	Week 18	Week 19	Week 20	Week 21	Week 22	Week 23
170.4	169.5	168.5	167.2	166.7	166.9	165.6	164.8	164.2	162.6
106.0	105.5	105.5	104.5	105.8	106.0	105.2	105.0	105.2	105.2
38.7	38.3	38.5	38.2	38.2	38.1	38.2	38.2	38.2	37.9
38.2	38.3	38.5	38.2	38.1	38.0	38.1	38.0	38.0	37.7
73.5	72.5	72.5	72.5	72.0	71.5	71.5	71.5	70.5	70.4
81.0	81.0	80.5	80.0	78.0	77.5	76.0	76.5	75.0	75.5
85.0	84.0	84.0	84.0	83.0	82.5	82.5	81.5	81.0	80.5
87.5	87.5	87.0	87.2	86.5	85.5	85.0	85.5	85.0	85.5
59.2	59.0	58.5	58.2	58.5	58.6	58.2	57.0	57.0	56.5
59.0	59.0	59.0	58.5	58.3	58.7	58.0	57.2	57.0	57.0
	P:160 C:205 F:40								P:160 C:165 F:40
	P:160 C:70 F:60								P:160 C:60 F:50
100	100	100	100	100	110	100	100	100	100
100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Weight loss **wasn't linear over the following eight weeks** (14–22), but you can see that this led to 6.2 pounds of weight loss. Again, this was a little short of our target, but as Dave was still **not claiming any issues** with hunger or fatigue, I made another calorie reduction.

	Week 15		Week 23
Tday Macros	P:160 C:205 F:40	→	P:160 C:165 F:40
R-day Macros	P:160 C:70 F:60	→	P:160 C:60 F:50

Dave took a diet break in week 24 for a vacation, then we resumed for four more weeks and decided to end the cut.

	Week 0	Week 28
Weight	182.2	160.0
Chest	106.0	104.9
R arm	39.2	38.4
L arm	39.4	38.2
2" above	85.1	69.5
Belly	90.2	75.5
2" below	90.2	80.4
Hips*	98.1	83.5
R thigh	60.0	55.5
L thigh	59.7	55.6
Target		
Training 4x Day Macros	P:180 C:255 F:45	P:160 C:165 F:40
Rest 3x Macros	P:180 C:110 F:75	P:160 C:60 F:50
	Start Cut	End Cut

In the 28 weeks of cutting, Dave lost 22.2 pounds and took 5.8" (14.7 cm) off his stomach. This maps on nicely to the heuristic I gave in the *How To Make Mid-diet Adjustments* chapter:

- ▶ *As a rough guide, every 4–5 pounds of fat loss will show itself with a 2–2.5 cm (~1") reduction on the stomach in two or more places.*

You can see that his arm circumference dropped by 1 cm, his leg circumference by 4.5 cm, and his chest measurement by around 1 cm. This is unusually good for 22.2 pounds of weight loss and suggests a little muscle gain.



DAVE'S COMMENT AFTER THE CUT

"I was a little skeptical about 'cutting' initially since I wanted to get bigger and stronger, as I have always felt skinny. However, I decided to submit to a proven strategy from an experienced coach and proceeded with the cutting phase. I am so glad that I did! I had no idea I could get this lean while getting stronger. I feel (and look) amazing!"

"I've always worked out, lived, and eaten healthily. However, I never really put all three of these together quite correctly. The combination of training, rest, nutrition, and stress management has led to the greatest success. Learning how to put all of these practices together properly has been the most valuable part of this experience."

COACHING EXPLANATION – THE TRANSITION TO A BULK

Dave had been losing approximately four pounds every six weeks.

We know that it takes approximately a 500 kcal daily deficit to lose one pound per week, which meant that the calorie deficit was around 335 kcal. However, as there was likely some metabolic slowdown, rather than adding 335 kcal, I'd suggested we add 500 calories daily.

I said to Dave, *“As protein needs are lower when in a calorie surplus, we could reduce protein, but you will be growing. So instead of making very small, awkward-to-manage increases in protein intake each month, I just suggest we keep it the same. Therefore, I'd suggest we make the calorie increase by increasing fat and carb intake. Here's my suggestion to reach that:*

▶ +100g carbs, + 10g fats on the training day (490kcal)

▶ +80g carbs, +20g fats on the rest day (500kcal)”

I told Dave that I felt we should shoot for a bodyweight gain of 1.5% per month, and with any luck, 50% or more of this will be muscle. This meant we would be aiming for 2 pounds of weight gain per month.

As my heuristic is to add 150 kcal each day, for every 1 pound of weight gain targeted per month, this meant we needed to add in 300 calories. Here's was my suggestion to reach that:

► +50g carbs, + 10g fats on each day (290kcal)

In summary, here was the transition plan:

	Week 28		Week 29		Week 31
Tday Macros	P:160 C:165 F:40	→	P:160 C:265 F:50	→	P:160 C:315 F:60
R-day Macros	P:160 C:60 F:50	→	P:160 C:140 F:70	→	P:160 C:190 F:80
	End of cut		Maintenance		Start of bulk

Let's see how it worked out...

Week 28	Week 29	Week 30	Week 31	Week 32	Week 33	Week 34	Week 35	Week 36	Week 37
160.0	N.A.	161.1	160.7	162.4	162.8	163.4	163.7	164.0	164.5
104.9	105.3	105.2	105.7	106.3	105.7	106.2	105.7	106.2	106.5
38.4	38.0	38.1	38.5	38.4	38.5	38.6	38.7	38.7	38.7
38.2	38.2	38.1	38.2	38.5	38.0	38.2	38.3	38.7	38.6
69.5	69.5	70.2	69.5	69.7	70.0	70.6	70.7	70.2	70.7
75.5	76.0	75.5	75.5	76.2	76.5	75.5	75.4	75.9	74.5
80.4	80.6	80.5	80.7	80.5	79.8	80.1	79.7	80.1	80.0
83.5	84.0	83.5	83.5	83.5	83.5	83.5	83.8	83.2	83.4
55.5	55.5	56.0	56.0	56.2	56.5	56.7	56.5	56.6	57.2
55.6	56.0	56.2	56.4	56.5	56.4	57.0	56.6	56.5	57.5
			Target +2 lbs/month						
	P:160 C:265 F:50		P:160 C:315 F:60						P:160 C:340 F:60
	P:160 C:140 F:70		P:160 C:190 F:80						P:160 C:215 F:80
	Move to maintenance		Move to a bulk						
100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
0	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	1
0	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

In the two weeks after moving to maintenance, Dave gained 1.1 pounds. As a reminder, this doesn't mean that he was in a calorie surplus; the weight gain could be from the additional gut content, water, and glycogen. Based on experience, I would

bet that he was still in a calorie deficit at that point, as I usually see more of a rise in weight. The **drop of 0.4 pounds the week after** seemed to confirm this.

We made the macro increase as planned in week 31 to move Dave into a bulk. In the following six weeks (31-36), Dave gained 3.3 pounds, but **only 1.6 pounds in weeks 33-36**. For this reason, I suggested a small bump to the macros of 100 kcal.

	Week 31		Week 37
Tday Macros	P:160 C:315 F:60	→	P:160 C:340 F:60
R-day Macros	P:160 C:190 F:80	→	P:160 C:215 F:80
	Start of bulk		

Week 36	Week 37	Week 38	Week 39	Week 40	Week 41	Week 42
164.0	164.5	165.2	164.9	166.0	166.4	166.2
106.2	106.5	106.7	106.7	106.5	106.9	107.2
38.7	38.7	38.8	38.9	38.9	39.0	39.1
38.7	38.6	38.7	38.8	38.8	39.0	39.0
70.2	70.7	70.5	70.9	70.7	70.1	70.4
75.9	74.5	74.9	75.0	73.5	73.6	74.0
80.1	80.0	80.9	80.4	80.5	80.5	80.5
83.2	83.4	83.5	84.0	83.5	83.1	83.4
56.6	57.2	57.7	57.7	57.5	57.8	57.5
56.5	57.5	58.2	57.7	57.5	57.8	57.5
	P:160 C:340 F:60					
	P:160 C:215 F:80					
100	100	100	75	75	100	98
100	100	100	100	100	100	100
1	1	1	0	0	0	1
1	1	1	0	0	1	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0

In the next six weeks (36-42), Dave gained only 2.2 pounds. Admittedly, for two of those weeks, he under-ate due to being sick, but I decided that another 100 kcal bump would be prudent.

	Week 37		Week 43
Tday Macros	P:160 C:340 F:60	→	P:160 C:365 F:60
R-day Macros	P:160 C:215 F:80	→	P:160 C:240 F:80

Week 42	Week 43	Week 44	Week 45	Week 46	Week 47	Week 48	Week 49	Week 50	Week 51	Week 52	Week 53
166.2	168.4	?	167.4	168.0	168.3	169.2	?	170.3	170.5	170.7	172.8
107.2	107.2	107.1	108.5	107.8	108.7	108.2	107.5	108.6	108.7	108.3	108.7
39.1	39.4	39.2	39.2	39.3	39.4	39.5	39.4	39.5	39.7	39.5	39.5
39.0	39.4	39.2	39.1	39.2	39.2	39.5	39.5	39.5	39.6	39.5	39.4
70.4	71.5	70.7	70.9	71.0	70.5	71.5	71.5	71.4	71.5	71.4	71.6
74.0	72.5	73.0	73.5	74.0	74.8	75.5	75.4	75.8	76.0	76.3	77.5
80.5	80.5	80.4	80.5	80.0	79.5	79.6	80.9	79.8	80.2	80.5	81.0
83.4	83.5	83.6	82.6	82.6	82.9	82.5	82.5	82.5	82.4	82.4	82.9
57.5	57.8	58.2	57.9	58.1	58.7	58.2	58.5	58.4	58.7	59.0	59.5
57.5	58.0	58.5	57.8	58.0	58.2	58.5	58.4	58.6	59.0	59.2	59.6
	P:160 C:365 F:60										P:160 C:405 F:70
	P:160 C:240 F:80										P:160 C:280 F:90
98	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
1	0	1	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

In the six weeks that followed (42-48), Dave gained 3 pounds, so things were perfectly on target at that point. However, by week 52, his weight gain slowed considerably. I decided to make a more aggressive bump to the calorie intake of 250 kcal.

	Week 43		Week 53
Tday Macros	P:160 C:365 F:60	→	P:160 C:405 F:70
R-day Macros	P:160 C:240 F:80	→	P:160 C:280 F:90

Week 51	Week 52	Week 53	Week 54	Week 55	Week 56	Week 57	Week 58
170.5	170.7	172.8	172.9	173.3	173.9	174.9	174.6
108.7	108.3	108.7	109.7	109.8	109.5	110.1	110.0
39.7	39.5	39.5	39.7	39.5	39.8	39.8	40.0
39.6	39.5	39.4	39.8	39.5	39.5	39.6	39.9
71.5	71.4	71.6	72.5	72.0	72.5	72.5	72.2
76.0	76.3	77.5	76.5	77.0	77.4	77.5	77.6
80.2	80.5	81.0	81.4	80.8	80.5	80.9	81.0
82.4	82.4	82.9	83.0	83.5	82.4	82.8	82.5
58.7	59.0	59.5	59.6	59.6	59.4	59.5	59.6
59.0	59.2	59.6	59.5	59.7	59.5	59.5	59.8
		P:160 C:405 F:70					
		P:160 C:280 F:90					
100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Dave’s weight rose by two pounds the week I made this change; however, this was to be expected. Ignoring this initial bump, he gained 1.7 lbs in the five weeks after. This is still short of the target, and he likely needs an additional bump soon. I’ll decide at his next update based on the data.

COACHING EXPLANATION – SUMMARY



	Week 28	Week 58
Weight	160.0	174.6
Chest	104.9	110.0
R arm	38.4	40.0
L arm	38.2	39.9
2" above	69.5	72.2
Belly	75.5	77.6
2" below	80.4	81.0
Hips*	83.5	82.5
R thigh	55.5	59.6
L thigh	55.6	59.8
Target		
Training 4x Day Macros	P:160 C:165 F:40	P:160 C:405 F:70
Rest 3x Macros	P:160 C:60 F:50	P:160 C:280 F:90
	End Cut	After 30 wks bulk

In seven months of bulking, we gained 14.6 pounds (6.7 kg). Dave added 5 cm to his chest/back measurement and added 4 cm to his legs. Note that his arms grew by 1.6 cm in the entire

seven months, which is only ~0.23 cm per month. Arm growth is a slow business and this is quite typical. I'd advise against trying to gauge progress by looking at your arm measurement changes from month to month because you can't distinguish progress from noise in the data. (See how his arm measurements fluctuated.)

Of the 14.6 pounds of weight gained, we know that some will have been water, glycogen, and gut content. I would *guess* we gained 5 pounds of fat and 6–7 pounds of muscle. This is a little better than the typical 1:1 ratio I see.

However, this means we fell short of our target of gaining two pounds of *tissue* (fat and muscle) per month. I took a purposefully prudent strategy with my calorie increases, because as Dave had mentioned at the outset that he had struggled his whole life with having “love handles,” and he was happy to be patient.

If you compare how Dave looks after seven months of bulking with the starting photo, though there is only a 7.5-pound difference in weight, I think you'll agree; he's well on the way to achieving the athletic body he desired.



I don't have Dave's comment after the bulk because we're still working together on it, but he's happy, and I think he should be!

[Here is Dave's data analysis and coaching decision video.](#)

Password: coachingmanual

DOM'S STRUGGLES WITH ADHERENCE

Success is not only about knowing what to do and when; it's also about making sure you do it.

I'd like to share this email exchange with a client called Dom. He had been struggling for many months with his adherence to both training and diet. This was in 2020, which was a tough year for many.

During the middle of that year, I very nearly suggested that we end the coaching. He wasn't adhering consistently enough to get results, I couldn't do my usual analysis, and so at our check-ins, I could offer little other than adherence strategies and pep talks.

But as if he had anticipated my thoughts, in that very next update, he told me this was the best coaching experience he had ever had. *"I can't promise I'll be perfect, but I can promise that if you continue to work with me that I will make the necessary changes on my end, and I think the results will show in time."*

That settled my concern that Dom wasn't getting the value out of this that I felt he should.

He requested anonymity, which is why I don't have photos or data. I have also changed his name.

Dom: *“What do you do to keep yourself motivated, especially when you don't feel like going to the gym or doing something in general?”*

“I'm concerned about how poor my adherence is. I know this is an issue and has been for some time. It was August of 2020 since I last had near 100% adherence to the gym.

“I looked back over the past week and asked myself why I didn't go, and ultimately it seems like I'm just not motivated enough. Most of my reasons were: soreness, tiredness, mood, or anxiety about work. Ultimately though, it wasn't like I couldn't go to the gym; I just didn't want to bad enough. I didn't feel like going, and I'm not at all sure how to solve this sort of problem of lack of motivation.”

Me: *“I don't necessarily have the 'right' answer for you. But I can talk about personal experience and what works for clients.*

“For me, obviously, this is my profession, and I have to keep in shape, but it's not something I think about very much. Training is just a part of who I am; it's a part of what I do during my week. — If it's Monday, I train; if it's Tuesday, I train. If it's Thursday, I train; if it's Friday, I train. — I block off time in my calendar, and I promise myself to get to that first piece of equipment by that time, even on the days I don't feel like training. Once I complete that first set, the funny thing is, the motivation to continue comes, and I end up following through.

“Training is a part of my identity now, and it is for many clients as well. It isn't a burden; it's just something we do. Clients have decided that they are someone who looks after themselves physically. Their body is the vessel for their soul on this journey we call life. Do you want to have a solid one that's going to support you?”

“If you take a deep look and don't want this, that is ok as well. There aren't any rights and wrongs here; it's about what you want. So don't let me force you into something.”

Dom: *“Hmm, so make lifting and nutrition part of my identity...”*

“That's probably the best advice you could give me. Right now, part of my identity is the opposite. I've never really been super fit, but I'm making progress now, and if I make that part of my self-image, that would probably give me enough motivation to go even on the tougher days.

“I definitely think there's something wrong with my attitude, and it's affecting my adherence.”

Me: *“As part of making it your identity, rather than telling yourself that you are a super fit person (which isn't true), you can tell yourself that you are someone who consistently trains and eats well. So the self-talk isn't, ‘I wish I were [goal*

physique],’ rather, ‘I am someone who performs [daily habits]’ knowing that this will eventually lead to the desired result.

“This way, you can tip the scales toward making better decisions every day. Focus on stringing together one day at a time of good choices. The choices will become habits, the habits compound. The result is a foregone conclusion, and you eventually become a super fit person.

“Does that make sense?”

Dom: *“Your explanation makes a lot more sense than what I was thinking about last night when I wrote to you. I still couldn't quite square the circle of what you were saying because, as you said, I'm not there yet in terms of my physique.*

“If you self-identify as being a fit person and think of yourself in that way, then you feel good about yourself, motivated to act, and maintain your level of fitness:

▶ **Thought (drives) -> Emotion (which drives) -> Action -> Favorable outcomes (physical fitness/improvement) -> Repeat.**

“Now you're in a positive feedback loop.

“This made sense to me, but given that I'm not a fit person yet, I couldn't square that circle of how to make that thought process work for me.

“This begged the following question: How do I feel good about myself before achieving my goals? Well, I can either:

- 1. Delude myself into thinking that I am actually fit and make reality conform to my worldview instead of the other way around.*
- 2. Find something else to think about that creates emotion/motivation that ultimately drives action.*
- 3. Give up.*

“What you've said here squares that circle. It helps set the foundation to create and foster a set of beliefs that motivate action and build towards the inevitable end, which is a great physique and an identity that embraces that.

“I think the problem I was having is that I was looking for motivation in the wrong places. My primary form of motivation has been improving my physique to enhance attractiveness. Obviously, there's nothing wrong with that, except that it's maybe not the best way to drive sustainable motivation.

“If I'm only thinking about how awesome this will be 2-3/4 years from now, that doesn't help me feel good about myself today. It makes otherwise easy days harder than they need to be, and it makes difficult days feel downright impossible to overcome. Adherence struggles are an inevitable and logical end to a set of beliefs that don't sufficiently drive the motivation required to complete the necessary tasks.

“I do think willpower is a part of the equation. Sometimes, perhaps the answer is, ‘Just do it because you have to.’ But if you choose to identify with the progress and habits you're building, you can feel good about that all the time, regardless of where you're starting at because the goals that govern your thoughts and mood are all relative.”

Me: *“I'd love your permission to share this discussion because it's the kind of deep, raw, real stuff that I think could benefit some people to read.”*

Dom: *“Yes. I think this is an under-discussed area of success in life in general. I think we all mostly assume that if someone shows up seeking help and asking for advice, they're sufficiently motivated to achieve success if given the correct information. But I think it's a mistake to assume that just because someone has the motivation to look for advice on the internet, they'll be sufficiently motivated when things get tough.”*

TARIQ'S FIRST CUT TO SHREDS



Age: 40, **Height:** 5'10 (178 cm),

Weight: 161.2 → 142.0 lbs (73.3 → 64.5 kg),

Stomach: 32.1" → 28.6" (81.5 → 72.7 cm)

[I have uploaded Tariq's spreadsheet data here.](#)

TARIQ'S COMMENT BEFORE WORKING TOGETHER

"I am a research scientist. I have achieved great things, but I tend to over-analyze things. While it helps me in my work, it's counterproductive when it comes to my training and nutrition. I find it hard to make a decision (I am going to bulk, for example) and stick with it when I am doing things myself."

COACHING EXPLANATION

I felt that Tariq had enough muscle mass to look great when shredded lean. He had stopped short of getting there in the past because he felt too skinny, so I recommended that we start by cutting and prepare to push through the discomfort to see what it would bring.

Tariq had a busy schedule that allowed him to train only three days per week. We had longer sessions and organized the training in a *push, pull, lower* split.

We agreed to target ~1.25 pounds per week of fat loss initially (0.55 kg), which was ~0.75% of body weight. Given Tariq’s level of training advancement, I wasn’t expecting any muscle gain and could use weight loss as a reliable indicator of fat loss.

	Week 0	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9
Weight	161.2	160.6	159.3	158.4	157.1	156.7	156.6	156.4	155.4	154.5
Chest	94.5	94.7	94.7	94.5	94.3	94.5	94.7	94.7	94.7	94.7
R arm	37.3	37.4	37.3	37	36.8	37	36.8	36.7	36.6	36.6
L arm	37.2	37.2	37.2	36.9	36.7	37	36.8	36.5	36.5	36.5
2" above	78.5	78.2	77.3	77	76.8	76.4	76.2	76.2	75.5	75.2
Belly	81.5	81.2	80.2	80	79.4	79.5	79.2	78.8	78.3	77.7
2" below	85.5	84.9	84	83.5	83	83.3	83	82.5	82.2	81.5
Hips*	93.1	92.2	92.5	92.2	91.8	92.2	92.5	91.8	91.8	91.5
R thigh	55.7	55.2	55.1	54.8	54.5	54.5	54.5	54.2	53.8	53.8
L thigh	55.5	55.2	55	54.6	54.2	54.2	54.3	53.8	53.6	53.6
Target	-1.25 lbs / wk									
Cardio										
Training 3x Day Macros	P:160 C:240 F:45									P:160 C:200 F:40
Rest 4x Macros	P:160 C:85 F:70									P:160 C:60 F:60
	Start Cut									
Calorie Total Adherence		105%	100%	100%	100%	105%	105%	105%	100%	105%
Training Adherence		100%	100%	66%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Sleep issues? (0-5)		0	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	1
Stress issues? (0-5)		0	0	0	1	2	1	0	1	0
Hunger issues? (0-5)		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fatigue? (0-5)		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

We lost 4.1 pounds (1.9 kg) in the first four weeks, which was a little less than targeted. There was **no sudden drop in weight at the start**; Tariq had been dieting previously, so carb intake, water, and gut content levels weren't much different. I could have made a small reduction to the macros at this point, but Tariq indicated that he was happy to be patient.

At the six-week update point, there had been **only a 0.5-pound decrease** in the previous two weeks. I suspected that we had some water retention because metabolic adaptation happens gradually, not suddenly slowing the rate of weight loss. Adherence was good. I suggested we push onward without making a change.

By week eight, it was clear that an adjustment was needed. We had **only lost 1.7 pounds in the previous four weeks**. I made a macro adjustment equivalent to 205 kcal and 150 kcal on the training and rest days.

	Week 0		Week 9
Tday Macros	P:160 C:240 F:45	→	P:160 C:200 F:40
R-day Macros	P:160 C:85 F:70	→	P:160 C:60 F:60
	Start of cut		

Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12	Week 13	Week 14
155.4	154.5	153.8	153.1	153.8	152.7	153.6
94.7	94.7	94.3	94.1	94.3	94.7	94.5
36.6	36.6	36.4	36.2	36.1	36.1	36.1
36.5	36.5	36.3	36.1	36	36	36
75.5	75.2	75.3	75.2	75.5	75.2	75.7
78.3	77.7	77.8	77.7	78	77.5	78.5
82.2	81.5	81.5	81.5	81.8	81	81.7
91.8	91.5	91.2	90.8	91.2	90.3	90.5
53.8	53.8	53.5	53.3	53.3	53.3	53.2
53.6	53.6	53.3	53.1	53.2	53.2	53.1
	P:160 C:200 F:40					
	P:160 C:60 F:60					
100%	105%	110%	105%	115%	105%	120%
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
0	1	0	0	1	0	2
1	0	1	0	1	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Over the next six weeks (8-14), Tariq **lost only 1.8 pounds**, but it would have been a mistake to reduce the macros at this point because he was struggling to adhere. (Between weeks 9-14 he **ate 10% over his target caloric intake** on average.) You can see that he **wasn't having issues with hunger, fatigue, sleep, or stress**; it was purely lifestyle factors causing the poor adherence. Tariq agreed to eat out less with friends and recommit.

Week 14	Week 15	Week 16	Week 17	Week 18	Week 19	Week 20	Week 21	Week 22	Week 23
153.6	152.1	150.7	149.6	148.4	148	147.2	146.6	146	147.2
94.5	94.3	94.2	93.8	93.2	93.8	93.6	93.5	93.5	94
36.1	36.2	36.1	36	36	36	35.8	35.8	35.9	36
36	36.1	36	35.9	35.9	35.9	35.7	35.7	35.8	35.9
75.7	74.5	74.3	74.2	74	73.5	73.1	72.2	72	73.2
78.5	76.7	75.9	75.5	75.3	74.8	74.5	73.6	73.3	74.8
81.7	80.2	79.6	79	78.7	78.3	77.8	77.5	77.2	78.5
90.5	90.5	90.3	89.6	89.2	89	88.5	88.5	88.5	88.7
53.2	53.2	53.1	53	52.9	52.5	52	52	52	52
53.1	53.1	53	52.9	52.8	52.4	51.9	51.9	51.9	51.9
									P:160 C:300 F:60
									P:160 C:160 F:80
									Diet Break
120%	105%	105%	100%	100%	105%	110%	105%	115%	100%
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
2	1	1	2	2	1	2	3	3	3
0	1	1	2	3	1	1	1	3	3
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

In the eight weeks that followed (14-22), Tariq lost 7.6 pounds and took 3–4 cm off his stomach. In the last four weeks of this, **he lost just 2.4 pounds**. Fat loss was slowing, but this was because of **adherence issues once again**, combined with rising stress and sleep issues due to work. Fortunately, he had a week off work planned, so we decided to have a diet break for that week (23).

Unlike most people, Tariq is a guy that finds not having specific targets to be stressful, so, rather than just raising calories, I gave specific macro targets to follow.

As we were losing a little over one pound when adherence was on point, the calorie deficit was likely to be around 600 kcal, so I

suggested we increase carbs by 100 g and fat by 20 g each day, for a 580 kcal total increase.

	Week 13		Week 23		Week 24
Tday Macros	P:160 C:200 F:40	→	P:160 C:300 F:60	→	P:160 C:200 F:40
R-day Macros	P:160 C:60 F:60	→	P:160 C:160 F:80	→	P:160 C:60 F:60
			Diet break		Resume cut

Week 22	Week 23	Week 24	Week 25	Week 26	Week 27	Week 28	Week 29	Week 30
146	147.2	146.2	145.2	145.2	145.2	143.5	143.2	142
93.5	94	94	93.5	93.4	93.4	93.5	93.5	93.3
35.9	36	36	36	35.8	35.7	35.7	35.6	35.4
35.8	35.9	35.9	35.9	35.7	35.6	35.6	35.5	35.2
72	73.2	72.6	72.2	72	72.2	71.9	71.6	71.4
73.3	74.8	74.1	73.4	73.3	73.5	73.2	72.9	72.7
77.2	78.5	77.9	77.3	77.2	77.3	76.9	76.6	76.3
88.5	88.7	88.7	88.4	88	88	87.5	87.5	86.6
52	52	52	51.7	51.6	51.5	51.1	50.9	50.5
51.9	51.9	51.9	51.6	51.5	51.4	51	50.8	50.4
					4*20-30mins LISS			
	P:160 C:300 F:60	P:160 C:200 F:40			P:140 C:180 F:35			
	P:160 C:160 F:80	P:160 C:60 F:60			P:140 C:40 F:55			
	Diet Break							
115%	100%	105%	105%	100%	105%	105%	105%	105%
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
3	3	1	2	1	2	1	1	1
3	3	1	2	2	2	1	2	2
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Tariq gained only **1.2 pounds** during the diet break, which quickly came off the week after. His dietary adherence was solid for the following two weeks (25–26), but **he lost only one pound**. It was time to cut the calorie intake once again; I suggested a ~200 kcal reduction each day.

			4*20-30mins LISS
	Week 24		Week 27
Tday Macros	P:160 C:200 F:40	→	P:140 C:180 F:35
R-day Macros	P:160 C:60 F:60	→	P:140 C:40 F:55

Tariq's hunger and fatigue ratings were low, his stress and sleep had improved, he was very eager to finish, so I granted his wish of adding some cardio along with it. Assuming a moderate effort level, we can estimate that this burned an additional 700 kcal per week (see the *How To Make Mid-diet Adjustments When Cutting* chapter), which is good for only an extra 1/5th of a pound of fat loss. However, the feeling of doing something extra was mentally beneficial to Tariq at this point.

	Week 0	Week 30
Weight	161.2	142
Chest	94.5	93.3
R arm	37.3	35.4
L arm	37.2	35.2
2" above	78.5	71.4
Belly	81.5	72.7
2" below	85.5	76.3
Hips*	93.1	86.6
R thigh	55.7	50.5
L thigh	55.5	50.4
Target		
Cardio		4*20-30mins LISS
Training 3x Day Macros	P:160 C:240 F:45	P:140 C:180 F:35
Rest 4x Macros	P:160 C:85 F:70	P:140 C:40 F:55
	Start Cut	End Cut

In total, Tariq lost 19.2 pounds (8.7 kg) and took 3.5" (8.8 cm) off his stomach. His arms lost around 2 cm, his legs close to 5 cm,

and his chest a little over 1 cm. Tariq got exceptionally lean, and leg fat is one of the last places to go in men, so I do not suspect any muscle loss.

TARIQ'S COMMENT AFTER COACHING

“To me, the most valuable part was the presence of a very smart coach when I started having doubts or when I thought I should stop because I am ‘lean enough.’

“You kept me focused on the bigger picture throughout, and that’s just priceless. If I were doing it by myself, I would have stopped halfway, thinking I should get back to bulking, and would have remained in that purgatory indefinitely.

“One of the biggest lessons that I learned was that when you go on a diet, about halfway through, you feel small and deflated, but if you keep at it, the place you end up at is much more satisfying and exciting.

I can't believe we have finally got to this point! Thank you so much, coach. You are AWESOME!”

[Here is Tariq's data analysis and coaching decision video.](#)

Password: coachingmanual

CAMERON'S JOURNEY TO 'FIT AND HEALTHY'



Age: 35, **Height:** 5'9.5 (177 cm),

Weight: 212.2 → 176.3 → 178.2 lbs (96.4 → 80.1 → 81.0 kg),

Stomach: 38.9" → 33.1" → 33.4" (98.8 → 84.2 → 84.9 cm)

[I have uploaded Cameron's spreadsheet data here.](#)

CAMERON'S COMMENT BEFORE WORKING TOGETHER

"I have never been fit and healthy. My freshman year in high school, I weighed 205 lbs, and when I finished my master's degree at 25, I was over 360 lbs.

"I lost the first 100 lbs on my own by making simple, obvious adjustments to my lifestyle, such as cutting out the junk food and soda.

“Eventually, I hit a plateau. I knew I needed to make changes, but I didn’t know what changes I needed to make. That is when it got really frustrating. I didn’t have the knowledge and experience to craft a personalized program, and I felt forced into one-size-fits-all programs.

“I felt like I was a failure because there was a huge disparity between the amount of effort I was putting in and the results I was getting. That’s when I decided I needed to hire a professional coach to help determine what works best for me. I’ve already dedicated 8 years to this, and I want to see it through to the end. Moreover, I want to be able to continue living life to the fullest with my wife and son.”

COACHING EXPLANATION – THE CUT

In case you are wondering about the loose skin, Cameron had already lost 140 pounds on his own before starting.

Cameron is another man with an exceptional capacity for consistency, despite all that life threw at him. I admire his dedication, and opening his emails would always be inspiring.

I suggested that we start by targeting 1.25 pounds per week of fat loss and said that we could slow this down based on how he felt as we progressed. We trained four days per week, with an *upper, lower, upper, lower* split.

	Week 0	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Weight	212.2	211.0	208.0	207.7	206.8	205.9	205.3	203.5	202.2	200.9	199.2
Chest	108.6	107.3	106.8	106.5	105.9	105.3	104.6	105.1	104.1	103.8	102.5
R arm	40.1	39.9	40.1	39.8	39.8	39.9	39.7	39.9	39.7	39.8	39.8
L arm	40.0	40.0	39.9	38.6	40.0	40.1	40.3	39.8	39.4	39.6	39.3
2" above	90.9	90.5	90.4	90.6	88.7	88.5	88.4	89.2	87.7	86.9	86.2
Belly	98.8	98.9	96.8	96.4	93.0	92.0	91.2	91.4	90.5	89.6	88.4
2" below	102.7	100.2	100.7	100.2	100.8	99.1	97.3	96.4	96.5	95.2	95.8
Hips*	109.2	109.7	108.1	108.6	108.5	107.1	105.7	106.0	106.0	104.4	104.4
R thigh	65.8	66.6	65.7	65.8	64.8	64.5	64.4	63.7	64.0	63.0	63.6
L thigh	64.1	65.4	63.2	64.5	62.7	62.7	62.7	62.4	62.1	63.0	60.8
Target	-1.25lbs /wk										
Training 4x Day Macros	P:200 C:200 F:55										
Rest 3x Macros	P:200 C:75 F:75										
	Start Cut										
Calorie Total Adherence		100%	100%	100%	100%	90%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Training Adherence		100%	0% / Sick	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Sleep issues? (0-5)		1	1	2	2	2	0	1	1	3	1
Stress issues? (0-5)		0	1	3	2	1	1	1	0	2	3
Hunger issues? (0-5)		0	0	1	1	2	1	1	1	0	0
Fatigue/lethargy? (0-5)		1	2	2	2	2	2	4	1	2	2

You can see that in the **first ten weeks**, his weight dropped by 13 pounds. The initial drop in weight from water, glycogen, and gut content **appeared mostly in week two**. This is unusual; you're unlikely to see that in your own data.

In week 11, he was in a road accident and needed to rest for a week or two. He said he could prepare food but not train.

I could have left the macros as they were, but as he had been dieting for ten weeks, I decided it would be nice to give him a break, so I increased them as follows.

	Week 0		Week 11
Tday Macros	P:200 C:200 F:55	→	P:200 C:275 F:80
R-day Macros	P:200 C:75 F:75	→	P:200 C:275 F:80
	Start of cut		Injury

As it turned out, we did this for only one week and then resumed the starting macros. Surprisingly, Cameron continued to lose weight at a consistent rate despite the macro increase. I can only put this down to an anomaly – strange shit happens with weight sometimes.

Week 11	Week 12	Week 13	Week 14	Week 15	Week 16	Week 17	Week 18	Week 19	Week 20	Week 21
198.0	196.7	195.6	194.4	193.5	192.6	191.7	191.0	193.6	191.6	188.9
102.1	101.9		102.1	102.0	102.0	102.1	102.8	102.7	103.1	101.0
39.7	38.5		38.9	38.8	38.6	38.6	38.7	38.9	38.9	38.2
39.2	38.4		39.1	39.0	38.9	38.7	38.4	39.1	38.5	38.0
85.5	85.1		82.5	82.4	82.1	82.4	82.7	85.6	84.9	84.1
88.1	88.0		86.1	85.4	84.8	85.2	86.0	88.5	87.9	85.7
95.0	93.7		91.4	89.9	88.6	88.8	89.1	93.2	92.7	90.0
103.9	103.2		102.7	101.5	100.0	100.3	101.2	102.0	101.7	98.7
63.3	63.4		63.0	62.4	61.5	61.0	60.3	61.3	60.8	60.2
62.0	61.6		61.5	61.0	59.9	60.0	59.9	59.7	58.5	58.4
Injury										
2450 kcal / day							Diet Break	Diet Break		P:200 C:200 F:55
P:200 C:275 F:80										P:200 C:100 F:80
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	?	?	100%	100%
0%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0% / Sick	100%
1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	4	3
1	2	2	1	1	3	2	1	1	1	1
0	1	2	2	3	3	2	2	0	2	2
1	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	4	2

From week 12 to week 17, Cameron lost five further pounds. In total, we had now lost 19.5 pounds in 17 weeks and taken 10.8 cm off his stomach. We agreed that it was time for a two-week, ad-lib diet break. He gained 1.9 pounds which were gone the week after.

Cameron mentioned that he was struggling to adhere on the rest days, so I decided to bump the macros slightly to allow him an additional ~150 kcal.

	Week 0		Week 21
Tday Macros	P:200 C:200 F:55	→	P:200 C:200 F:55
R-day Macros	P:200 C:75 F:75	→	P:200 C:100 F:80
	Start of cut		

Week 23	Week 24	Week 25	Week 26	Week 27	Week 28	Week 29	Week 30	Week 31	Week 32	Week 33	Week 34
187.0	190.1	192.2	188.9	187.1	186.3	184.9	184.0	183.9	182.8	180.7	180.6
101.9	100.8	101.0	101.2	101.3	101.7		101.0	101.9	101.9	103.5	102.1
37.4	38.3	38.4	38.2	38.3	38.4		38.1	37.5	36.8	37.4	37.4
37.5	38.5	38.4	38.1	38.4	38.7		37.5	37.3	36.4	37.7	37.3
82.9	84.3	84.1	83.8	82.2	81.5		83.7	81.8	81.1	80.8	79.0
84.8	87.0	86.9	86.5	84.7	82.5		86.4	83.9	82.2	82.3	81.0
89.7	90.7	90.4	88.8	89.0	88.8		86.9	86.5	84.4	85.4	85.4
98.1	101.6	101.3	100.4	98.9	97.4		99.2	97.0	97.3	98.0	97.6
60.7	61.3	60.7	60.0	59.8	59.3		58.0	58.9	57.3	58.7	58.1
59.1	59.4	59.3	58.1	57.6	57.7		56.2	57.3	57.7	57.5	56.6
	Diet Break	Diet Break									
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
2	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2
1	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	5
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2
1	1	2	2	1	2	4	2	1	1	2	2

You'll see that in weeks 24-25, we took another diet break. This was for a family vacation. He **gained 5.2 pounds**, which is pretty standard, but notice how his **stomach measurements didn't**

increase much during this time. This signifies that the weight gain was water, gut content, and glycogen, as expected.

In the two weeks after the diet break, Cameron lost all of the regained weight. You can see that his stomach measurements had now dropped to below pre-diet break levels.

From weeks 28–34, he lost an additional 5.7 pounds, which was a little short of our target.

Week 34	Week 35	Week 36	Week 37	Week 38	Week 39	Week 40	Week 41	Week 42	Week 43	Week 44	Week 45	Week 46	Week 47	Week 48
180.6	182.8	190.6	186.8	183.6	182.8	179.0	178.6	177.7	176.7	175.2	174.7	175.9	176.2	176.3
102.1	102.5	103.3	104.2	102.9	103.0	Sick	101.8	101.0	101.1	102.0	100.0	103.1	102.0	101.1
37.4	37.7	38.3	38.4	38.1	37.3		37.0	36.6	37.7	37.8	36.9	37.6	36.7	36.9
37.3	37.6	37.8	38.0	38.3	37.8		37.1	37.4	37.4	37.6	37.2	37.4	36.4	36.9
79.0	81.8	85.6	84.1	82.7	81.2		81.4	79.0	78.5	78.8	78.2	79.0	78.8	78.5
81.0	83.3	89.2	87.7	84.2	87.7		83.6	84.8	81.2	82.2	78.9	83.8	84.0	84.2
85.4	87.0	92.8	89.6	87.3	89.0		84.2	85.6	84.7	84.4	82.9	86.4	86.1	86.4
97.6	98.6	100.4	98.0	97.6	99.9		97.0	96.6	95.4	96.0	96.4	96.0	95.2	96.4
58.1	58.9	59.6	58.3	58.4	59.8		57.3	57.6	57.3	56.5	56.3	57.1	56.9	56.5
56.6	57.2	58.2	57.5	57.8	58.0		56.3	56.9	55.8	55.9	55.7	56.2	56.2	55.9
	Diet Break	Diet Break												
100%	Diet Break	Diet Break	90%	100%	100%	Sick	100%	100%	100%	100%	95%	50%	100%	100%
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
2	2	1	2	2	2	5	2	3	3	3	4	3	2	3
5	3	1	1	1	1	3	2	1	3	3	4	4	4	4
2	1	1	4	2	4	4	1	1	1	1	2	4	2	2
2	2	1	1	2	1	4	1	2	3	2	3	2	2	3

It was time for another vacation, which meant taking another diet break. You can see that I have marked the weight in red for weeks 35 and 36. These numbers represent just a single weigh-in rather than a daily average because Cameron didn't have access to his scale. You can see that Cameron's weight came up

by ten pounds, and it took us **a few weeks to return to pre-diet break levels.**

From week 39–49, we lost an additional seven pounds. This was slightly slower than the initial plan, but **stress, sleep, hunger, and fatigue numbers started to rise**, so we decided not to reduce the calorie intake further.

	Week 0	Week 48
Weight	212.2	176.3
Chest	108.6	101.1
R arm	40.1	36.9
L arm	40.0	36.9
2" above	90.9	78.5
Belly	98.8	84.2
2" below	102.7	86.4
Hips*	109.2	96.4
R thigh	65.8	56.5
L thigh	64.1	55.9
Target	-1.25lbs /wk	
Training 4x Day Macros		P:200 C:200 F:55
Rest 3x Macros	P:200 C:75 F:75	P:200 C:100 F:80
	Start Cut	End Cut

Cameron's abs were showing, and we decided to end the cut. He lost 35.9 pounds (16.3 kg) and took 14.6 cm (5.8") off his stomach. He lost 3 cm off his arms, 7.5 cm off his chest, and 9 cm off his legs. Though it wasn't all smooth sailing, he made strength gains throughout, so I don't suspect any muscle losses.



CAMERON'S COMMENT AFTER THE CUT

"I used to make huge sweeping changes, moving from one program to another, but personalized coaching is the complete opposite. When something is working for me, I continue to do it. Whenever we identify a problem, we discuss the options, and you made a recommendation for a specific adjustment to address a specific problem. We're not starting from scratch; we are taking what works and refining it to make it better.

My results have been amazing. It has exceeded my expectations. Despite stress, illness, holidays, everything life threw at me, we managed to keep on course, and I think the results so far speak for themselves."

[Here's a video of Cameron talking through his story.](#)

COACHING EXPLANATION – THE TRANSITION TO A BULK

At the end of the diet, Cameron was losing around 0.5 lbs per week. We agreed to take a month at maintenance before moving into the bulk. He wanted to be cautious, so I suggested an increase in calorie intake of around 250 kcal.

Week 48	Week 49	Week 50	Week 51	Week 52	Week 53	Week 54
176.3	175.8	175.5	174.7	175.1	174.2	176.1
101.1	98.6	99.8	98.9	101.6	100.2	102.9
36.9	37.1	37.5	36.3	36.6	36.6	37.1
36.9	36.4	38.1	36.4	36.8	36.7	37.0
78.5	78.9	79.4	79.0	78.4	78.6	78.4
84.2	86.9	83.3	80.8	85.3	80.8	81.8
86.4	86.5	88.6	86.6	86.2	84.9	84.9
96.4	96.3	95.3	95.5	97.8	96.6	96.5
56.5	56.7	56.6	57.4	57.3	57.5	56.9
55.9	55.8	55.7	56.2	56.3	56.1	55.7
	P:180 C:250 F:60					P:180 C:325 F:65
	P:180 C:150 F:85					P:180 C:225 F:90
	Move to maintenance					Move to a bulk
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
3	3	2	2	1	1	1
4	3	3	2	3	4	3
2	1	1	1	1	2	3
3	3	2	1	1	1	2

Cameron **continued to lose weight** and achieved his best condition five weeks after we had planned to end the cut. Why? Because we were still in a calorie deficit.

In hindsight, I should have increased his calorie intake by another 200 kcal or so to account for metabolic adaptations.

(This is why in the *Transitioning To Maintenance* chapter, I suggest adding more than the calculated calorie deficit.)

However, Cameron was happy with the cautious approach, so there was no harm done.

As someone who had struggled with obesity the majority of his life, it was understandable for him to be nervous about fat regain. I suggested a ~350 kcal increase from here.

	Week 48		Week 49		Week 54
Tday Macros	P:200 C:200 F:55	→	P:180 C:250 F:60	→	P:180 C:335 F:65
R-day Macros	P:200 C:100 F:80	→	P:180 C:150 F:85	→	P:180 C:225 F:90
	End of cut		Maintenance		Start of bulk

Week 53	Week 54	Week 55	Week 56	Week 57	Week 58	Week 59	Week 60	Week 61
174.2	176.1	177.7	178.9	178.6	178.7	179.0	179.7	178.9
100.2	102.9	103.2	103.6	101.9	102.9	102.7	102.0	101.9
36.6	37.1	36.8	36.8	37.3	37.3	37.7	37.5	37.4
36.7	37.0	37.1	37.2	37.4	37.9	37.9	37.6	37.2
78.6	78.4	78.9	78.4	80.4	78.7	78.9	81.1	80.9
80.8	81.8	83.6	85.0	84.4	83.5	84.7	85.0	84.8
84.9	84.9	87.0	87.1	88.3	85.5	85.6	86.2	85.5
96.6	96.5	97.6	97.7	97.3	95.2	97.4	96.9	97.0
57.5	56.9	58.5	57.1	57.5	58.4	57.5	57.4	57.2
56.1	55.7	56.9	56.8	57.5	57.4	56.0	56.7	56.2
	P:180 C:325 F:65							P:180 C:210 F:55
	P:180 C:225 F:90							P:180 C:100 F:80
	Move to a bulk							
100%	100%	100%	90%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
1	1	1	2	3	2	2	2	2
4	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3
2	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1

Cameron gained 5.5 pounds in the seven weeks after commencing the bulk. His mid-stomach measurement had risen by 4.2 cm, and this made him exceptionally nervous. So in week 61, I agreed to reduce the macros to a level where I felt he would be in a slight calorie deficit, and he could hang out there for a while. This wasn't about what was necessarily optimal but what was reassuring for Cameron.

	Week 54		Week 61
Tday Macros	P:180 C:335 F:65	→	P:200 C:210 F:55
R-day Macros	P:180 C:225 F:90	→	P:200 C:100 F:80
	Start of bulk		Slight deficit

(From here, [please view the spreadsheet.](#))

You can see that after 34 weeks (61-95) and two vacations, we lost another 8.1 pounds. He had achieved his leanest figure ever, and he made progress with his training.

You will notice that there was only a ~2.5 cm drop in the stomach measurements, and the chest and limb measurements remained roughly the same. This suggests *slight* muscle growth, as fat will have been lost in these areas also, but this is not the kind of progress that is typically enough to keep someone motivated, so it is not what I would typically recommend. However, what I *typically* recommend and what I *actually* recommend don't always match. – This is what individualized coaching is all about. Cameron was happy, which was the important thing. He finally felt comfortable, and we decided to transition back into a bulk from week 96 onward.

The remaining 20 weeks followed the same pattern of gradually bumping up the macros that I showed you with Dave's bulk. I won't bore you by repeating myself here.



CAMERON'S COMMENT AFTER THE BULK

"It's hard to capture everything in spreadsheets and emails. I have made some strong associations between what we track, what I experience, and how that impacts my progress."

"The last two years have been an incredible experience. I've made a lot of progress, and I'm looking forward to the future. I feel like I have all the tools to do this on my own, but if I run into any major bottlenecks, I may seek you out again. Otherwise, I'll send updates every 6-12 months just to keep in touch!"

[Here is Cameron's data analysis and coaching decision video.](#)

Password: coachingmanual

ADDENDUM

At the time of writing, it has been two years since Cameron and I worked together. When I reached out to check if I could include his story in this book, this was his reply:

“I'd love to be in the book! It feels great knowing that the details of my journey will help others. Also, I realized I never sent you the updates I promised.”

“I've had multiple cycles of bulking and cutting since we last talked. My training has gone up to 5 days a week (from 4), emphasizing hypertrophy. The extra lean mass I've gained allows me to eat more calories, but I'm still following the same basic principles for tracking and adjustments.”

“I've always been curious about my body-fat percentage. It's difficult to visually estimate because of my excess skin, so I decided to try a DEXA scan after my last cut. I've got a huge smile on my face in the photo because the results came back at 10.4%. I don't know what's special about 10%, but it feels like a major milestone in men's physique. The printout I went home with was better than any trophy or medal.”

“I was 178.8 lbs in the photo, so I ended 2020 bigger and leaner. That's the goal, right? 😎”



Cameron, December 2020.

FINAL THOUGHTS



What you have read is not sexy, and there are no quick fixes. But the fastest way to get to your goal is to make sure you are on the right path in the first place.

Have patience, and try to remain clinical and objective when interpreting your data and making decisions.

You won't always be able to be perfect. When things don't go to plan, avoid taking an 'all-or-nothing' attitude.

Around half of my clients travel often for work. This makes things more challenging, but by far, the most important determinant of success or failure for these clients over the years has been attitude.

- ▶ Do your best to eyeball the food portions you receive in restaurants, comparing portion sizes of carbs and protein on the plate to your fist, palm, and thumb, and thinking back to how that was when cooking at home.
- ▶ It takes a while for your brain to signal that you are full. So if you are dieting, make a conscious effort to chew your food slowly. Ideally, eat some salad first, followed by protein, and then the carbs after.
- ▶ It is very hard to estimate fat content, or the macros in sauces. You have to guess.
- ▶ Take some protein powder with you and have some if the portions you find in restaurants aren't large enough.

- ▶ Don't be afraid to leave things on your plate.
- ▶ Stay at hotels with a gym, if you can. Google gyms in the surrounding area if you can't. If nothing is available, take bands with you and perform bodyweight workouts as per [this guide](#).

Know that for every person I have coached, there are hundreds who have used the guides on the site and been successful. That's without having this book in their hands. You have everything you need; now crush it!

If you have any questions, I've created a [support page here](#), and will be available in the comments.

Thank you for reading!

RESOURCES

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ [The RippedBody Nutrition Setup Guide](#) – Consider sharing this free ebook with friends. It's bundled with a 7-day follow-up email course covering the mistakes people typically make.
- ▶ [The Muscle and Strength Pyramid: Nutrition](#), by Eric Helms, Andrea Valdez, and myself. – A more detailed look at nutrition setup with a focus on physique competitors and powerlifters.
- ▶ [The Muscle and Strength Pyramid: Training](#), by Eric Helms, Andrea Valdez, and myself. – The perfect companion to this book to cover the training side of things.
- ▶ [The Art and Science of Lifting](#), by Greg Nuckols
- ▶ [Science and Development of Muscle Hypertrophy](#), by Brad Schoenfeld

LEARNING HOW TO LIFT

- ▶ [The Big 3 Basics](#) – 46 videos teaching you to master the Squat, Bench Press, and Deadlift. (Video product we developed over three years.)
- ▶ [How To Squat](#) – Free article based on video product.

- ▶ [How To Bench Press](#) – Free article based on video product.
- ▶ [How To Deadlift](#) – Free article based on video product.
- ▶ [The Lifting Library](#) – Teach yourself the other lifts. (Video product by my colleagues at 3DMJ.)

WEBSITE RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ [3DMuscleJourney](#) – Bodybuilding.
- ▶ [StrongerbyScience](#) – The science of lifting.
- ▶ [Examine.com](#) – Reliable supplement information.

COACHING RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no way to develop deep expertise until you see the same types of problems repeatedly. The only way to do that is to specialize, to focus on a niche.

I am a man; I understand men best, so that is why I choose to work with men.

I am a recreational trainee, not an athlete, physique competitor, or powerlifter, which is why I choose to work with recreational trainees.

This can leave some people disappointed, and I'm often asked for other coaching recommendations. These are people I have known for years, speak to often, and trust completely:

- ▶ StrongerbyScience.com for bodybuilding and powerlifting competitors.
- ▶ [3DMuscleJourney](https://3DMuscleJourney.com) for physique and bodybuilding competitors.
- ▶ [Sohee Lee](#) for female recreational trainees. (My co-author on The Muscle and Strength Pyramid books, Eric Helms, is her PhD supervisor.)
- ▶ [Reactive Training Systems](#) for elite powerlifting competitors.
- ▶ [The Strength Athlete](#) for powerlifting and remote injury rehab.

INSTAGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ [Ben Carpenter](#) consistently puts out the best nutrition content I have seen. I could list more here, but I don't want to divert any attention away from Ben's account. If you don't give him a follow, you are missing out.

RESEARCH REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

Making sense of the latest research is exceptionally hard. I trust these guys to do it. These monthly publications are slightly geekier than my average reader will be looking for, but this is where I mainly learn from and what my team and I subscribe to:

- ▶ [Monthly Applications in Strength Sport \(MASS\)](#)
- ▶ [The Weightology Research Review](#)
- ▶ [The Examine Research Digest](#)
- ▶ [Alan Aragon's Research Review](#)

WORDS OF THANKS

I owe a debt of gratitude to the clients who consented to share their photos and data. Real-world examples bring these concepts to life, and the book wouldn't be what it is without you.

Thank you to the readers who took the time to give feedback on previous editions of the book. Sharing what you liked and wanted to see more of, what you felt could be better explained, and what you wanted to see included in this third edition has made it infinitely better.

I value *your* opinion, and you will be getting future editions of this book for free. If you can spare 5 minutes to answer some short questions giving feedback, it would be most helpful and appreciated: [click to tell me your thoughts](#).

Thank you for reading, and best of luck.

- Andy