THE NO-TRACK NUTRITION SERIES

BUILD STRENGTH + MUSCLE WITHOUT TRACKING

A precise food system for stronger training, steady recovery and lean mass gain - without a calorie app.



NO APP. A CLEAR SYSTEM.

Portions, decisions and adjustments.

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THE HONEST STARTING POINT

You can make excellent progress without tracking calories.

Calorie tracking is the quickest way to quantify food intake accurately. It is useful, but it is not compulsory. Your body responds to what you repeatedly eat and do, not whether those choices were entered into an app.

No tracking does not mean no structure.

This system replaces daily calorie logging with repeatable hand portions, a fixed meal rhythm and a short weekly review. Follow the starting plan for 14 full days before changing anything.

01 BUILD

Use the exact plate and meal rhythm in this guide. Choose from the food lists rather than improvising every meal.

02 REPEAT

Keep portions stable most days. Aim for at least 85% of planned meals across the week.

03 REVIEW

Check the goal dashboard weekly. If the expected trend is absent, make one small adjustment only.

Your 14-day agreement

- Use four eating opportunities every day: three meals plus one planned growth snack.
- Strength train 3-4 times per week and follow progressive overload.
- Keep protein identical on training and rest days; muscle grows during recovery too.
- Review body-weight trend, waist and performance once each week.

STARTING RULE

Do not reduce portions after one heavy day, one meal out or one scale fluctuation. Return to the next planned meal. Consistency beats compensation.

LEARN ONCE, USE ANYWHERE

Your hand is the measuring kit.

These visual portions scale roughly with body size and work in kitchens, restaurants and work canteens. They are starting points, not laboratory measurements.

PALM

Protein

One palm-sized, palm-thick serving. Usually about 20-30 g protein depending on the food.

CUP

Carbohydrate

One cupped handful cooked rice, pasta, grains or cereal; or one fist-sized potato.

FIST

Plants

One fist of vegetables or fruit. Two fists can be two different colours.

THUMB

Added fat

One thumb of oil, butter, nut butter, cheese, nuts, seeds, pesto or creamy dressing.

Useful household translations

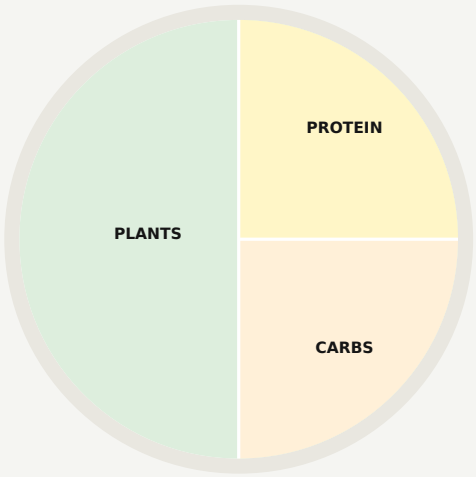
Portion	Food examples	Use this when learning
1 palm protein	Chicken, fish, lean meat, tofu, high-protein yoghurt	About 120-150 g cooked meat/fish, 200 g tofu or 200-250 g yoghurt
1 carb cup	Rice, pasta, oats, beans, potatoes, bread, wrap	One cupped hand cooked, one medium wrap, or two average slices bread
1 fat thumb	Oil, nut butter, nuts, seeds, cheese, avocado	About 1 tablespoon oil/nut butter, or a small closed handful of nuts

You do not need to weigh food every day. If a visual portion is unfamiliar, measure it once or twice, then use the visual cue.

MUSCLE AND STRENGTH

The Growth Plate

Muscle gain requires a training stimulus, sufficient protein and enough total food. A very large surplus is unnecessary and is more likely to add body fat. [1,2,7]



- 1.5-2 palms protein
  At each main meal.
- 1-2 fists plants
  Keep micronutrients and digestion covered.
- 2 carb cups
  Main training fuel.
- 1 fat thumb
  Add a second if intake is hard to raise.

The daily rhythm

Eating time	Exact starting prescription	Purpose
Breakfast	1.5 palms protein + 2 carb cups + 1 fruit + 1 fat thumb	Start daily intake
Lunch	1.5-2 palms protein + 2 carb cups + 1-2 fists plants + 1 fat thumb	Build the base
Growth snack	1 palm protein + 1 carb cup + 1 fat thumb	Reliable energy surplus
Dinner	1.5-2 palms protein + 2 carb cups + 2 fists plants + 1 fat thumb	Recovery and glycogen

THE GROWTH BLOCK

If body weight and gym performance are both static after 14 consistent days, add one daily growth block: 1 carb cup + 1 fat thumb. Put it at breakfast, in the growth snack or after training. Keep it in place for another 14 days before reviewing.

YOUR FOOD LIBRARY

Choose mostly foods that make the system easier.

There are no magic foods and no forbidden foods. Core foods make portions, protein, fibre and recovery easier to manage. Flexible foods can still fit deliberately.



PROTEIN FIRST

- Chicken / turkey
- Lean or 5% beef
- Salmon, tuna, prawns
- Eggs and egg whites
- Greek yoghurt / skyr
- Milk and cottage cheese
- Tofu / tempeh / seitan
- Protein powder if useful

CARBS WITH PURPOSE

- Oats and cereal
- Rice and pasta
- Potatoes
- Bread, bagels, wraps
- Beans and lentils
- Fruit and dried fruit
- Granola
- Sports drink around hard training

PLANTS + FATS

- Frozen vegetables
- Salad kits
- Berries / bananas
- Olive oil
- Peanut butter
- Nuts and seeds
- Avocado
- Cheese and pesto

The 80/20 decision

Build 80-90% of intake from nutrient-dense foods. Flexible foods can make eating enough easier, but they should not displace protein, plants or the meals that support training.

MAKE DECISIONS AUTOMATIC

Use four meal templates.

Pick one option from each line. Repeat breakfasts and lunches if that makes your week easier. Variety across the month matters more than novelty at every meal.

BREAKFAST

Formula: 1.5P + 2C + fruit + 1T.

Example: eggs and egg whites, two toast portions, fruit and peanut butter.

LUNCH

Formula: 1.5-2P + 2C + 1-2V + 1T.

Example: beef burrito bowl with rice, beans, salsa and avocado.

DINNER

Formula: 1.5-2P + 2C + 2V + 1T.

Example: chicken pasta with tomato sauce, vegetables and parmesan.

GROWTH SNACK

Formula: 1P + 1C + 1T.

Examples: yoghurt, granola and nuts; milk shake with banana, oats and peanut butter.

Mixed meals: use the batch rule

- Cook 6-8 protein palms and 8 carb cups at once; divide them before serving.
- Make the growth snack the night before so it cannot be forgotten on busy days.
- Keep two dense emergency options available: bagels and nut butter; yoghurt and granola; milk and a banana.

IF HUNGER IS HIGH

If eating enough feels difficult, use lower-volume carbs and healthy fats: rice, pasta, bread, dried fruit, olive oil and nut butter. Drink some energy as milk or a simple shake, but do not replace every meal.

A FULL WEEK WITHOUT LOGGING

Monday to Thursday

This example uses four eating opportunities daily. Strength days are Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Rest days keep protein high and reduce carbohydrate only slightly if appetite is lower.

DAY	BREAKFAST	LUNCH	DINNER	SNACK / FUEL
MON Strength	Eggs + toast + fruit + nut butter	Chicken rice bowl + veg + oil	Beef pasta + vegetables	Yoghurt + granola + nuts
TUE Strength	Skyr + oats + banana + seeds	Turkey bagel + soup + fruit	Salmon + potatoes + greens	Milk, banana, oats + peanut butter shake
WED Rest	Protein oats + berries	Tuna pasta salad + olive oil	Chicken curry + rice + veg	Cottage cheese + toast + fruit
THU Strength	Eggs/egg whites + bagel + fruit	Beef burrito bowl + avocado	Turkey meatballs + pasta + veg	Skyr + cereal + nuts

SWAP, DO NOT GUESS

Change chicken to fish, rice to potatoes, or berries to fruit - but preserve the number of palms, cups, fists and thumbs. That is how variety stays consistent.

A FULL WEEK WITHOUT LOGGING

Friday to Sunday

Use this as a complete example, then swap foods within the same portion category. Keep the structure even when the ingredients change.

DAY	BREAKFAST	LUNCH	DINNER	SNACK / FUEL
FRI	Yoghurt + granola + fruit	Chicken pesto pasta salad	Fish tacos + beans + salad	Peanut butter toast + milk
SAT Strength/social	Protein oats + banana	Eggs + bagel + fruit	Restaurant: protein main + 2 carb portions + vegetables	Post-training yoghurt + granola
SUN	Omelette + toast + avocado	Leftover rice/protein bowl	Roast protein + potatoes + 2 veg + gravy	Milk smoothie + fruit

The 45-minute weekly prep

- Cook two protein choices and two carb bases.
- Make three growth snacks in containers.
- Keep quick carbs visible: fruit, bread, cereal and microwavable rice.
- Set meal reminders if missed meals are common.
- Choose one restaurant meal that still contains a clear protein anchor.

TURN FOOD INTO TRAINING

Arrive fuelled. Leave with a recovery plan.

Total daily food and protein matter most, but distributing protein across 3-4 meals and placing carbohydrate around training makes hard sessions easier to repeat. [1-3]

WHEN	WHAT TO DO	GOOD OPTIONS
2-3 hours before	1 palm protein + 1-2 carb cups; moderate or low fat	Chicken/rice; yoghurt/oats; eggs/bagel
30-60 minutes before	If needed, one easy carb portion and fluid	Banana, toast, cereal bar or sports drink
Within 2 hours after	1.5 palms protein + 2 carb cups	A main meal, or growth shake followed by a meal
Before bed	Use the growth snack here if dinner was early	Skyr, cottage cheese, milk or soy yoghurt plus cereal/fruit

FOOD CANNOT REPLACE PROGRESSIVE TRAINING

Your programme should gradually add repetitions, load, sets or better control. More food without progressive resistance mostly increases body mass; a training stimulus directs more of the gain toward muscle.

Rest days still count

Keep all protein meals and the growth snack. If appetite is lower, use 1-1.5 carb cups at one or two meals rather than 2, but do not turn rest days into accidental dieting.

RESTAURANTS, TAKEAWAYS AND WEEKENDS

Keep the structure. Drop the perfectionism.

A useful system must survive work meals, family food and social events. The goal is not to make every meal lean; it is to stop one choice turning into an unplanned weekend.

1 PROTEIN

Choose a clear protein anchor first: grilled meat/fish, eggs, tofu, beans, yoghurt or a lean burger.

2 PLANTS

Add vegetables, salad or fruit. Ask for an extra side if the meal contains none.

3 ONE MAIN CARB

Choose rice, potatoes, bread, pasta, noodles or dessert as the main extra - not every option automatically.

Use the 'choose two' rule.

At a richer meal, choose the two that matter most: alcohol, starter, dessert, chips, creamy sauce or extra cheese. Enjoy them deliberately. You do not need all six because it is the weekend.

Common situations

Situation	Decision
Busy workday	Use a bagel or wrap with 1.5 palms protein, a yoghurt, fruit and nuts. Missing lunch is not a muscle plan.
Restaurant	Choose a full protein main, vegetables and 2 carb portions. Dessert can replace the growth snack.
Low appetite	Choose dense foods, smaller meals and a milk/soy shake; avoid filling up on huge salads before protein and carbs.
Alcohol	Keep it modest; it can displace food, harm sleep and reduce training quality. Do not count drinks as a growth block.

NON-TRACKING STILL NEEDS FEEDBACK

Look for stronger lifts and a slow body-weight rise.

Fast weight gain is not faster muscle gain. The useful trend is small, steady and accompanied by better performance. [7]

SIGNAL	HOW OFTEN	WHAT GOOD PROGRESS LOOKS LIKE
Body weight	3 mornings/week; average	Roughly +0.1-0.25%/week after the beginner phase
Waist	Every 2 weeks	Small or stable rise relative to strength progress
Strength log	Every session	Reps, load or controlled volume improving
Recovery	Weekly	Soreness resolves; energy and sleep remain useful
Adherence	Weekly	Four eating opportunities on at least 6 days

The weekly review

- Did average weight rise at all across 2 weeks?
- Did two or more key lifts improve?
- Was the growth snack eaten on at least 12 of 14 days?
- Is waist rising faster than performance?

Daily body weight is optional. If the scale harms your relationship with food or your body, use waist, photos, clothing fit and performance instead.

AFTER 14 DAYS

Change one lever, then hold it.

Random changes create random data. Only adjust after two consistent weeks, and only when the relevant outcome has genuinely stalled or moved the wrong way.

ON TRACK

Body weight is rising slowly and lifts are improving. Keep all portions unchanged. Do not add food just because progress feels slow.

NO CLEAR TREND

If body weight and performance are static after 14 consistent days, add one daily growth block: 1 carb cup + 1 fat thumb.

RECOVERY / HEALTH FLAG

If waist rises quickly for 2 weeks without performance gains, remove the most recent growth block and check training quality, sleep and weekend extras.

Adjustment rules

- Do not double portions after one hard session.
- Add food at a reliable meal or snack, not through random grazing.
- Beginners may gain muscle at stable body weight; use strength and photos as well as the scale.
- A larger energy surplus tends to increase fat gain more than muscle gain. [7]

Never respond to one meal, one weigh-in or one poor workout. Look for a repeated pattern.

Hold each adjustment for another 14 days unless health, hunger or recovery makes it clearly unsuitable.

WHEN THE PLAN FEELS DIFFICULT

Solve the problem beneath the problem.

Most stalls are not caused by a broken metabolism. They come from invisible extras, changing portions, missed meals, under-fuelling training, low sleep or an unrealistic weekly routine.

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	NEXT ACTION
Weight not rising	Growth snack missed; meals too small	Add the snack daily and one growth block after 14 consistent days.
Full all day	Too much low-energy bulk; meals too close	Use rice, pasta, bread, oil and shakes; spread food across 4-5 hours.
Waist rising fast	Surplus too large; weekends unstructured	Remove the newest booster and keep protein/training unchanged.
Lifts not improving	Training plan, sleep or technique - not only food	Review programme progression and recovery before adding more food.

WHEN TO GET PERSONALISED HELP

Speak with a GP and/or registered dietitian before major nutrition changes if you are under 18, pregnant or breastfeeding, have kidney disease, diabetes treated with medication, gastrointestinal disease, a history of an eating disorder, unexplained weight change, or symptoms of under-fuelling. Persistent fatigue, repeated injury or illness, menstrual disruption, low libido, dizziness and a worsening relationship with food deserve attention.

This booklet is education, not diagnosis, treatment or a substitute for individual medical care.

PRINT OR SCREENSHOT THIS PAGE

A seven-day consistency check.

Tick the process, not perfection. A strong week is usually 85% consistent, not 100% controlled.

HABIT	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
Four eating opportunities	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Protein 3-4 times	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Two carb cups at training meals	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Daily growth snack	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Fruit / vegetables 4+ portions	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Planned strength completed	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Sunday review

Wins I can repeat: _____

The meal or situation that needs a plan: _____

My relevant outcome trend: _____

One action for next week: _____

If adherence was below 85%, improve the routine before changing portions.

EVIDENCE AND SCOPE

References and further reading

The evidence supports protein distribution, progressive training, balanced food patterns and training-specific carbohydrate. The hand-portion system is a practical coaching framework for consistent decisions; it is not a clinical prescription.

[1] Jager R et al. International Society of Sports Nutrition position stand: protein and exercise. JISSN, 2017.

[2] Morton RW et al. Protein supplementation and resistance-training adaptations: systematic review and meta-analysis. Br J Sports Med, 2018.

[3] Thomas DT, Erdman KA, Burke LM. Position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Dietitians of Canada and ACSM: Nutrition and Athletic Performance. 2016.

[4] NHS. The Eatwell Guide: balanced food groups and higher-fibre carbohydrate choices. NHS guidance.

[5] NHS. How to get more fibre into your diet: UK adult target of 30 g daily. NHS guidance.

[6] NHS. Physical activity guidelines for adults aged 19 to 64. NHS guidance.

[7] Helms ER et al. Effect of small and large energy surpluses on strength, muscle and skinfold thickness. Larger surpluses mainly increased fat gain. Sports Med Open, 2023.

Start with the next meal.

You do not need perfect data. You need a repeatable system, honest feedback and enough time for the trend to emerge.