



# III

*Guides*

## **Macronutrients**

A simple, no-nonsense guide to understanding macronutrients—what they are, why they matter, and how to build balanced meals that actually support your goals.

## WELCOME, I'M REALLY GLAD YOU'RE HERE.

Let's talk about food—but not in a “here's what you can't eat” kind of way.

This guide is about understanding what your body actually needs to feel strong, energised, and well. Because the truth is, when you know how to fuel yourself properly, everything starts to feel a bit easier. Your workouts hit better. Your energy lasts longer. Your goals feel more doable.

We'll break down each macronutrient—protein, carbs, fats, and fibre—so you know what they do, where to find them, and how to build a plate that works for you. There's no one-size-fits-all plan here. Just solid, practical info to help you feel more confident and in control.

So whether you're just getting started or you're ready to refine things, this guide is here to support you every step of the way.

Let's get into it.

*Briony*

The Holistic Health PT



# WHAT ARE MACRONUTRIENTS

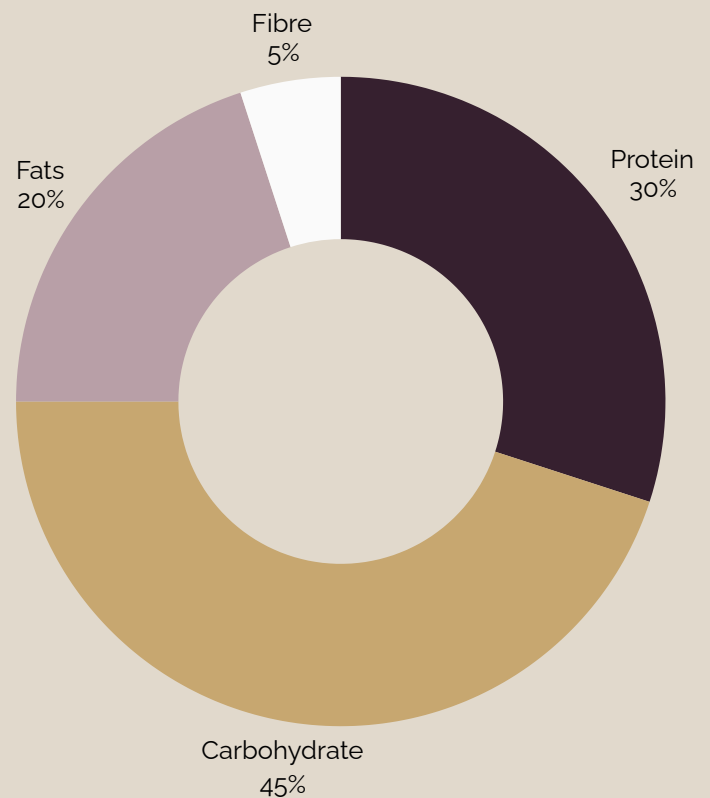
*Building blocks of your diet*

Macronutrients (often called “macros”) are the nutrients your body needs in large amounts to survive, thrive, and function at its best. Every single food you eat is made up of one or more of these macronutrients: protein, carbohydrates, fats, and fibre.

They're not just numbers or targets in an app — they have real jobs in your body. Understanding what they do can help you feel more in control of your nutrition, make smarter choices without restriction, and build meals that actually work for your body and your goals.

Here's a quick overview of each:

- Protein helps you build and repair muscle, recover after workouts, stay fuller for longer, and keep your immune system strong.
- Carbohydrates are your body's main source of energy — they fuel your brain, your training, and your day-to-day life.
- Fats support hormone health, brain function, and nutrient absorption. They help keep you satisfied and stabilise your energy.
- Fibre keeps your digestion healthy, supports blood sugar control, and helps you feel fuller for longer — especially when combined with protein.



While you'll hear about macros a lot in the context of weight loss or muscle gain, the truth is: they matter for everyone. Whether you're looking to feel better, train harder, or simply learn how to build a more balanced plate, understanding macronutrients is a great place to start.

In the sections that follow, we'll break down each macro in more detail — what it does, where to find it, and how it fits into a balanced meal.



# PROTEIN

*Repair. Recover. Satisfy. Strength.*

Protein is essential for repairing, maintaining, and building muscle, but it does far more than just support your workouts. Every cell in your body — from your skin to your hair to your immune system — relies on protein.

When you're training (especially strength training), protein becomes even more important. It helps your muscles recover, grow, and adapt to the work you're doing. Without enough protein, your body struggles to rebuild — which can affect your results, energy, and even how sore you feel.

It also helps with appetite control. Protein takes longer to digest than carbs, which means it helps you feel fuller for longer. If you ever find yourself constantly hungry, even when you're eating regularly, increasing your protein is often one of the first things to look at.

## **How much protein do I need?**

A general guide for active adults is around 1.6–2.2g of protein per kg of bodyweight per day. For example, a 70kg woman might aim for around 110–150g of protein daily depending on her goals.

You don't need to hit this number perfectly every day — but building most of your meals around a good protein source is a strong starting point.

Great sources of protein include:

- Chicken breast, turkey, lean beef or pork
- Salmon, white fish, prawns
- Eggs and egg whites
- Greek yoghurt or Skyr
- Cottage cheese
- Tofu, tempeh, and edamame
- Lentils, chickpeas, and beans (also contain carbs)
- Protein powder (whey, casein, or plant-based)



# PROTEIN

*Repair. Recover. Satisfy. Strength.*

## **What this looks like on a plate:**

Try to include a palm-sized portion of protein at every main meal (or around 20–30g of protein). That might look like:

- A chicken breast with roasted veg and potatoes
- A tofu stir fry with rice
- Greek yoghurt with berries and granola
- A protein smoothie with banana, oats, and peanut butter

Quick tip:

You don't have to eat just chicken and broccoli. Pick protein sources you enjoy, mix them up across the week, and don't be afraid of convenience — a scoop of protein powder or a Skyr yoghurt is a totally valid way to hit your goals.

## **Start Strong: 35g of Protein at Breakfast**

Getting around 35g of protein at breakfast isn't just about keeping you full — it can have a big impact on your overall health and energy levels throughout the day.

When you eat a high-protein breakfast, your body responds by releasing less insulin compared to a carb-heavy one. That's important because high insulin levels (especially in the morning) can make fat loss harder and increase cravings later in the day. Research shows that starting the day with a protein-rich meal can improve insulin sensitivity, helping your body manage blood sugar better across the next 24 hours.

It also helps reduce mid-morning hunger and snacking, keeps your energy more stable, and supports muscle maintenance if you're training. If you're struggling with afternoon crashes or sugar cravings, breakfast could be the first place to look.

Need ideas? Think Greek yoghurt bowls, protein oats, eggs with toast, or a smoothie with added protein powder — aim for around 30–40g total to see the benefits.



# CARBOHYDRATES

*Fuel. Fibre. Focus. Flavour.*

Carbs often get a bad rap, but they're not the enemy — they're your body's preferred source of energy, especially for your brain and during workouts. Whether you're heading into a spin class, a strength session, or a long day at work, carbs help keep you focused, fuelled, and ready to move.

## There are two main types of carbohydrates:

- Complex carbs – Think oats, potatoes, wholegrain bread, brown rice, lentils, beans, fruit, and veg. These are higher in fibre and digest more slowly, giving you longer-lasting energy and keeping you fuller for longer. They're ideal for most meals throughout the day.
- Simple carbs – These digest quickly and include foods like white bread, sugary snacks, cereal bars, or juice. They're not 'bad' – they just work best around workouts when you need quick energy or fast recovery.

You don't need to avoid carbs — you just need to use them smartly.

A balanced plate might include:

- A palm-sized portion of lean protein
- A fist-sized serving of carbs (e.g. sweet potato, couscous, wholegrain pasta)
- Half a plate of colourful veg or salad
- A thumb of healthy fat (e.g. olive oil, avocado)

Carbs also help carry water and electrolytes into your muscles, support recovery, and even help with sleep when eaten in the evening. The key is quality, quantity, and timing — not cutting them out entirely.

That's why timing matters:

- A meal with complex carbs a few hours before training (like oats, rice, or a bagel) helps top up your glycogen stores.
- A small snack with some quick-digesting carbs 30–60 minutes before (like a banana or a cereal bar) gives you a little extra boost if needed.
- After training, a mix of protein + carbs helps replenish what you've used and kickstarts recovery.

In short: if you want to train well, recover well, and feel good doing it — don't skip the carbs.



# CARBOHYDRATES

*Fuel. Fibre. Focus. Flavour.*

## How Carbohydrates Power Your Workouts

When you train — whether it's spin, strength, or steps — your body turns to carbohydrates first for fuel. That's because carbs are stored in your muscles and liver as glycogen, which is your body's most accessible source of energy during movement.

Here's how it works:

- During lower intensity exercise (like walking or steady-state cardio), your body uses a mix of carbs and fat for fuel.
- As intensity increases (like lifting weights, sprinting, or cycling up a hill), your body relies more and more on carbohydrates — because they can be broken down quickly to meet the demand.
- If you're low on carbs, you might feel tired, heavy-legged, or even dizzy — because your muscles are running low on fuel.

Think of carbs like petrol in a car:

No fuel = no power. Enough fuel = you can go harder, recover faster, and enjoy your training more.

That's why timing matters:

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# FATS

*Hormones. Health. Headspace.*

Fats often get a bad rap in diet culture — but they're essential, especially for women. Your body needs fats for hormonal balance, brain function, skin and hair health, and even your mood. They're not something to fear — they're something to understand and include intentionally.

Here's why they matter:

- **Hormones:** Fats are the building blocks of many key hormones, including oestrogen and progesterone. A diet too low in fat can disrupt menstrual cycles and lead to fatigue, mood swings, or even amenorrhea (loss of period).
- **Nervous system + brain:** Your brain is nearly 60% fat. Fats (especially omega-3s) help regulate mood, reduce inflammation, and support cognitive function. Ever felt foggy or irritable on a super low-fat diet? That's why.
- **Absorbing vitamins:** Vitamins A, D, E and K are fat-soluble — meaning your body needs dietary fat to absorb them properly.

Not all fats are created equal, though. Focus on:

- Healthy fats like olive oil, avocado, oily fish (like salmon and mackerel), nuts, seeds, and eggs.
- Avoid trans fats where you can — often found in processed foods and takeaways. These don't support your health and can increase inflammation long term.

Fats also keep you fuller for longer, slow digestion slightly, and help meals feel satisfying — which is especially important if you're trying to stick to a nutrition plan without feeling like you're constantly hungry.

In short: don't cut fats — choose the right ones, in the right amounts, and give your body the tools it needs to thrive.



# FATS

*Hormones. Health. Headspace.*

Understanding the types of fat can help you make smart choices without overthinking every meal.

## 1. Unsaturated Fats — the good guys

These are the fats that support heart health, reduce inflammation, and help balance hormones. They're usually liquid at room temperature and come mostly from plant and fish sources.

- Monounsaturated fats: avocado, olive oil, almonds, cashews, peanuts
- Polyunsaturated fats: walnuts, sunflower seeds, flaxseeds, chia seeds, oily fish (like salmon, sardines, mackerel)

Omega-3 fatty acids (a type of polyunsaturated fat) are especially important for brain health, mood, and hormonal balance.

## 2. Saturated Fats — not the villain

These get a bad name, but they're not all harmful. In moderation, saturated fats can be part of a healthy diet. Some saturated fat is necessary for hormone production and cell health.

- Sources: full-fat dairy, eggs, coconut oil, dark chocolate, red meat

Tip: Include them, but try to balance with more unsaturated fats overall.

## 3. Trans Fats — avoid when possible

These are the ones to watch out for. Trans fats are man-made fats found in some processed and fried foods. They increase inflammation and are linked to a higher risk of heart disease.

- Found in: baked goods, margarine, fast food, and anything with "partially hydrogenated oils" on the label

You don't need to track every gram, but aim to eat more of the helpful fats, keep the saturated ones balanced, and avoid the artificial stuff where you can.





# FIBRE

*Underrated but essential.*

## **Fibre-rich swaps**

Small changes can make a big difference:

- White bread → seeded or wholemeal
- Low-fibre cereal → oats or bran
- Add a handful of frozen veg, lentils, or beans to meals
- Snack on fruit, nuts, or roasted chickpeas instead of biscuits or crisps

## **Increasing Fibre Alongside Protein**

As your protein intake goes up (especially if you're focusing on lean meats, protein powders, or bars), it's important to increase your fibre too.

### Why?

Because high-protein diets can sometimes cause sluggish digestion or constipation—especially if they're low in plant foods. Fibre helps keep everything moving, supports regular bowel movements, and balances the heavier load on your gut from increased protein intake.

Here's how to keep things in sync:

- Add veg to every meal – even breakfast (hello spinach and mushrooms in your eggs)
- Pair protein with plants – e.g. chicken and roasted veg, Greek yogurt and berries, protein oats with flaxseed
- Snack smart – choose options that combine protein and fibre like hummus and carrots, boiled eggs and an apple, or a protein bar with a handful of almonds

Balancing your protein and fibre doesn't just help your digestion—it also supports blood sugar control, satiety, and gut health.



# BALANCE

*Fuel long term health*

## What Does a Balanced Plate Look Like?

Aim for balance, not perfection. Here's a simple way to visualise your main meals using the plate method:

Component	Portion Size	Example Foods
Protein	¼ of your plate	Chicken, tofu, eggs, Greek yogurt, mince, salmon
Carbohydrates	¼ of your plate	Rice, potatoes, pasta, couscous, oats, wraps
*Vegetables/Fibre	½ of your plate	Broccoli, spinach, carrots, peppers, tomatoes, salad
Healthy Fats	Thumb-sized portion or drizzle	Olive oil, avocado, nuts, seeds, cheese

### Tip:

You don't need to measure everything — just aim for a visual balance. This helps support energy, satiety, blood sugar control, and overall health.



# READING LABELS

*Know what you're eating.*

Nutrition labels can feel overwhelming—but once you know what to look for, they become a powerful tool for making informed choices. Here's a breakdown using this Gym Kitchen Chicken Tikka Masala as an example:

## Per Pack vs Per 100g

- Per pack shows the total values for the full meal.
- Per 100g helps compare different products by weight.

Unless you're eating part of a pack, focus on the per pack column.

NUTRITION			
Typical Values (microwaved)	Per pack	Per 100g	RI (%)*
Energy kJ	1540	406	
Energy kcal	365	96	18%
Fat, total	6.2g	1.6g	9%
- saturates	1.6g	0.4g	8%
Carbohydrate	43g	11g	
- sugars	13g	3.5g	14%
Fibre	8g	2.1g	
Protein	30g	8g	
Salt	1.4g	0.37g	23%

## What to Look For

### 1. Protein (30g per pack)

This is a high-protein meal—perfect post-workout or to support muscle maintenance. Target: Aim for at least 20–30g per meal.

### 2. Carbohydrates (43g per pack)

Carbs provide energy—especially useful around training.

Note the 13g of sugar—some of this might be from tomatoes or sauce, but check ingredients if you're watching added sugars.

### 3. Fats (6.2g per pack)

This is a moderate-fat meal with only 1.6g of saturates—well within a healthy range.

Tip: Try to keep saturated fat low across the day.

### 4. Fibre (8g per pack)

This is excellent. Most people struggle to get enough fibre, but this meal makes a great dent in your 25–30g daily goal.

### 5. Salt (1.4g per pack / 23% of daily intake)

This is on the higher side. One higher-salt meal is fine now and again, but balance it out with lower-salt meals elsewhere in the day.

## Quick Tips

- Green = generally good, orange = moderate, red = high (if colour coded).
- Ingredients list: First ingredient is the biggest—helpful for spotting if a meal is mostly sauce vs protein.
- Watch out for serving sizes—sometimes a pack is 2 servings when it looks like 1.



# NUTRITION & YOUR MENSTRUAL CYCLE

*Fuel your cycle wisely.*

Your energy needs, cravings, digestion, and even training performance can shift throughout your cycle — so it makes sense your nutrition might, too. While everyone's experience is different, understanding how your hormones fluctuate across the month can help you make smarter food choices that support your body, not fight against it.

## **Follicular Phase (Days 1–14)**

Includes: Menstruation + lead-up to ovulation

Estrogen starts low and gradually rises, helping you feel more energised and mentally sharp. You may also tolerate carbs better in this phase.

Nutrition tips:

- Prioritise protein and fibre to support muscle growth and digestion.
- Include complex carbs to fuel training and support mood.
- Keep meals consistent and balanced — this is often when motivation is highest.

## **Ovulation (Around Day 14)**

Estrogen peaks. Some women feel strong, confident, and full of energy. Others might notice a dip in appetite or sleep.

Nutrition tips:

- Stay hydrated and don't skip meals even if hunger dips.
- Eat magnesium-rich foods (leafy greens, seeds, dark chocolate) to support recovery and reduce inflammation.

## **Luteal Phase (Days 15–28)**

Progesterone rises, and many women experience increased hunger, cravings, bloating, and lower mood or energy.

Nutrition tips:

- Focus on slow-digesting carbs (like oats, lentils, sweet potato) to manage cravings.
- Keep protein high to stay fuller for longer.
- Support digestion with plenty of fibre and water.
- Include foods rich in B vitamins and zinc to help with mood, energy, and PMS.

## **A kind note**

You're not failing if you feel hungrier, more tired, or a little off during certain phases. Nutrition isn't about perfection — it's about awareness. Supporting your body throughout your cycle can make a big difference in how you feel, perform, and recover.



# YOU'VE MADE IT TO THE END—WELL DONE.

Hopefully this guide has helped take some of the confusion out of nutrition. Because once you understand the basics, it stops being about restriction and starts being about support—fueling your body in a way that actually feels good and sustainable.

You don't need to get everything perfect. You don't need to track every gram. But having a clearer picture of what your body needs? That's powerful. And it gives you the freedom to make choices that truly work for you.

Keep building meals that support your goals. Keep noticing how food makes you feel. Keep coming back to balance.

And remember—if you ever feel stuck, you don't have to figure it out alone. I'm always here if you need support.

You've got this.

*Briony*

The Holistic Health PT

