Cutting: Adjusting Your Calories for Fat Loss

The goal of cutting, as we know, is to decrease our body fat percentage while holding on to as much of that newly gained muscle as possible. You also don't want to feel hungry or deprived all the time—the "diet mentality" is typically associated with eating in a caloric deficit or, as some put it, "starving myself to lose weight." Eating in a caloric deficit for prolonged periods of time can mess with your metabolism and can throw your hormones out of whack. As you move through this phase, there are some strategies you can apply so you don't feel like you're "dieting." These strategies can also offset the negative consequences of calorie restriction.

To maximize muscle retention while losing fat, you should aim for a caloric deficit of **0.5–1%** and around **10–20% off of maintenance calories**. This largely depends on various factors (gender, metabolic rate, and a myriad of other factors such as current body fat percentage), but generally speaking, this is a good starting point for most. Setting a goal to lose 1.5–2 pounds per week is aggressive, where **0.5–1 pounds** is safer and more manageable. It's not recommended to go over the two pounds of weight loss range per week or you're putting yourself at risk of losing the muscle mass that you worked so hard at building. Plus, it's more likely that you'll throw in the towel if that deficit is too extreme. Your mood and energy levels will suffer dearly. Trust me, I've been there.

Let's once again get into the simple math.

Step 1: Set Your Target Weight Range

Your weight × 0.005 = lower end of weekly weight gain
Your weight × 0.01 = higher end of weekly weight gain

Example:
For my current weight of 139lbs:
139lbs. × 0.005 = ~0.7
139lbs. × 0.01 = ~1.4
I'd aim to lose ~0.7-1.4 lbs. of body weight per week.

Step 2: Adjust Calories to Put Yourself in a Negative Energy Balance:

Your maintenance calories × 10%
Your maintenance calories × 20%

Example:
My maintenance calories of ~ 2,234
2,234 × 10% = 223
2,234 × 20% = 447
I'd want to eat in a caloric deficit of 223–447 calories per day.