

YOUR GUIDE TO CALCULATING CALORIES &
MACROS, AND FUELLING YOUR FITNESS ON A
VEGAN DIET

VEGAN FOOD LOGGING

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VEGAN FOOD LOGGING 101:

Your guide to logging your food, calculating calories and macros, and fuelling your fitness on a vegan diet

PART 1: WHY YOU SHOULD LOG YOUR FOOD, ESPECIALLY IF YOU'RE VEGAN

Want to make sure you're fuelling your workouts with proper nutrition? Want to tweak your diet to gain muscle or lose fat? If your nutrition is something you'd like to work on, the best way to improve it is to log your food. This will give you baseline information to see where you're currently at, and then you'll be able to measure whether you're making your intended improvements.

When we log our food, we can get useful information about our total calorie intake and whether it suits our fitness, health, and physique goals. We can also get information about the relative proportion of macronutrients (carbohydrate, protein, and fat) we're consuming, and whether we're taking in enough vitamins and minerals.

I get all my clients to use the [MyFitnessPal](#) app because it's robust and easy to use. Keep in mind that I don't think food logging should be a long-term strategy (unless you really, really enjoy it) – I usually use it with new clients to get a sense of their current nutrition, and then we use it intermittently throughout our coaching to work toward specific goals.

Vegan or not, why should I log my food?

One reason I get all my clients to log their food, at least for a few days before we do any nutrition coaching, is because we humans are very good at rationalizing and not very good at remembering details. It can be an eye-opening experience to track your food for a few days. Sometimes, you'll see trends you didn't know existed!

I have one client who logged her food for the first time and was surprised by the amount of mixed nuts she ended up eating, one small handful at a time, over a 5-day period. There's nothing inherently wrong with nuts, but they're little calorie powerhouses, and if that doesn't fit with your particular goal and you're eating tons and tons of them every day, you could be stalling your progress.

Tracking our food intake can be a great way to increase overall awareness of what we're putting into our mouths each day. That alone often leads to making better food choices. Clinical research supports this; studies have found that people who use apps like MyFitnessPal to track their food lose significantly more weight than those who don't ([source #1](#); [source #2](#)).

Food logging can also be an excellent educational tool to use while you implement specific changes (e.g. increasing protein intake, lowering overall calories). Once you feel like you've got the hang of your new habit without relying on the app, you can wean yourself off food logging and go with intuition instead.

Sometimes I get my clients to log their food to make sure they're eating *enough*, especially if their goal is to gain muscle. It might sound counterintuitive, but people often don't see the results they want because they're not eating enough (especially women, who are constantly bombarded by bullshit messages to diet, eat less, restrict, and be physically smaller).

Food logging also tells us where you're at with your macros – the proportion of your food that is comprised of carbohydrates, protein, and fat. I work with my clients to make sure their nutrition is supporting their particular fitness and physique goals. A long-distance cyclist who wants to maintain her weight, for instance, will have a different macro ratio compared to a strength athlete currently in a bulking phase.

One of my clients recently wondered why she was having trouble adding muscle and losing fat (she was very fit already). She tracked her food for the first time and we found she was getting only 10% of her total calories from protein. That's not gonna kill her by any means, but it's not anywhere near enough to sustain 4 days per week of strength training, let alone muscle gain.

As a long-term fitness and health nut (and vegan) since 2003, I'm pretty much on autopilot when it comes to nutrition. I know what and when to eat, I know what works for me and what doesn't, and I know approximately how many calories I eat in a day and where my macros are at, without really thinking about it. However, I still log my food for a few days every few months to make sure that I'm getting everything I need – enough total calories, enough protein, enough iron, etc.

Why you should log your food if you're vegan

We all know that “vegan” does not automatically mean “healthy”. Hey, French fries, Oreos, potato chips, and Skittles are all vegan! (Thank goodness.)

We vegans need to pay special attention to our nutrition, especially if we're active. A well-planned vegan diet is exceptionally healthy and has many benefits over omnivorous diets – some professional athletes are even adopting plant-based diets to increase their athletic performance – but the key term here is *well-planned*. We need to make sure we're eating an adequate variety of foods, and consuming enough of the nutrients that tend to require a bit more conscious effort to get on a 100% plant-based diet: vitamin B12, calcium, and iron.

If you're just starting out as a newbie vegan, you definitely want to make sure you're doing things right. If 80% of your calories are coming from carbs, that ain't balanced. (You'll learn more about macros and how to determine yours in Part 2 of this e-book.)

If you're already a long-term vegan with a clean bill of health and a diet that contains all the nutrients you need, food logging can take you to the next level of results in your fitness. Whether your goal is muscle gain, fat loss, or maintenance, tailoring your nutrition to your lifestyle and chosen physical activities means you'll be functioning at your best.

Other vegans are in situations where their diets can be challenging to maintain due to culture, geographic location, lack of access to vegan foods, frequent travel, or living situation and family dynamics. If this describes you, logging your food for a while can help to expose potential gaps in your overall nutrition; whether it's macronutrient ratios, total calories per day, or vitamin and mineral content.

In addition to logging food regularly, I recommend all vegans get a blood test every year or two to make sure their nutrient levels are on target.

When should I perhaps *not* log my food?

For some people prone to unhealthy psychological relationships with food, or those who deal with eating disorders, food logging – and thus by default calorie counting – is sometimes detrimental to psychological health. It can add unnecessary self-imposed restriction and can put negative, instead of positive, mental focus on food. On the other hand, I've read several accounts of people with eating disorders who have been helped, in part, by food logging. Only you can know whether it's best to include food logging in your recovery plan (making sure that you're working with a qualified professional, of course).

Food logging can be an extremely useful tool, but if used excessively, it can become a crutch that takes us away from what our bodies are telling us. I use food logging perhaps 2 days out of every 100. The other 98% of the time I rely on intuition, habit and routine, and listening to my body.

My clients use food logging for very specific purposes, like muscle gain, fat loss, or finding out what their macros are. It's also very useful for clients currently trying to make a particular change to their diet so we can track whether or not it's working (e.g. adding more protein: we can see daily totals and make sure they're increasing). Once you have a good idea of where you're at with your overall calories and macros, you don't need to keep logging your food indefinitely.

PART 2: HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR CALORIE AND MACRONUTRIENT GOALS ON A VEGAN DIET

Food is fuel. It can support or detract from your fitness and physique goals.

I try to get my clients to view food as fuel for their chosen lifestyles and activities. The fuel we choose can support or detract from our goals. One very effective way of finding out whether our nutrition is adequately supporting our goals is, of course, to log our food.

Remember, there's no such thing as "good" food or "bad" food; there's just food that supports your goals, and food that might not. The occasional and guilt-free treat should be part of any nutrition plan that supports your goals, but most of us know that moderation is important.

Most of us also know the basics when it comes to the *types* of foods that would best support our goals. Oatmeal with hemp hearts for breakfast instead of Froot Loops, for example. An entrée salad with smoked tempeh for lunch instead of deep fried onion rings. Roasted chickpeas or veggies and hummus as snacks instead of Skittles and Oreos (yup, they're vegan). A homemade tofu and vegetable curry for dinner instead of a bag of chips.

Remember: just because your diet is vegan, doesn't mean it's nutritious or supporting your fitness and physique goals.

You don't need food logging to figure out what *types* of food might be more nutritious choices than others. I'd say that's pretty intuitive, right? Where food logging comes in is when you've nailed the basics of good food choices, and you want to get more detailed.

First up: calorie counting

After you feel like you've (mostly) got the hang of choosing the *types* of foods that support your particular goal, the next step is to find out whether the total *volume* of food you eat is supporting or detracting from your goals.

This is where calories come in. The best and easiest way of getting a reasonably accurate idea of your calorie consumption is to log your food in an app like MyFitnessPal.

What, exactly, is a calorie?

A calorie is not a physical entity. It's a measure of energy – specifically, heat. The word comes from the Latin word “calor”, which means “heat”. So, we're measuring the amount of energy foods will provide in the human body.

One calorie is the amount of energy it takes to heat one gram of water by one degree Celsius. Now, just to confuse you with numbers for a sec, when we talk about calories in relation to food, what we're actually talking about is kilocalories (1000 calories). People will often use the terms “calorie” and “kilocalorie” interchangeably in the context of food.

So, if you're a scientist, a calorie is the amount of energy it takes to heat one gram of water by one degree Celsius.

If you're a non-scientist talking about what you're eating, a food calorie is the amount of energy it takes to heat one *kilogram* of water by one degree Celsius. If you log your food and your calorie total comes out to 2500, that's actually 2500 kilocalories, or 2,500,000 “true” calories.

For more details on all this confusing math, read [this article](#).

How do I figure out how many calories I should consume per day?

Well, this depends on your goals! If you want to stay at the same weight, you'll need to consume your maintenance calories. If you want to gain weight (99% of the time the goal would be muscle!), you'll need to eat more than your maintenance calories. And if you want to lose weight, you'll need to eat less than your maintenance calorie number.

So, not surprisingly, the first step is calculating your maintenance calories.

Step 1: Calculate your maintenance calories.

This is the calorie calculator I use with all my clients – and for myself! It takes into account many different variables, and is much more accurate than the MyFitnessPal app. Remember that any calorie calculator isn't going to be exact. Instead, it's giving you a ballpark figure to work with. No calculator is perfect.

So, use this calorie calculator to get an estimate of how many calories you expend in a day. This is an estimate of your maintenance calories, meaning your body weight wouldn't change if you were to consistently consume this number of calories per day. If you're looking to change your body composition and/or body weight, you need to tailor this number to your specific goal.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The calorie calculator I recommend using includes your average daily physical activity (unlike the default MyFitnessPal calorie estimate, which doesn't). This way, you'll be tailoring your nutrition to the physical activity you're doing, instead of adding in physical activity later (which is how MyFitnessPal is set up by default. More on this in Part 3 of this e-book).

Step 2: Adjust your maintenance calorie number to suit your fitness and physique goals.

My goal is fat loss

If your goal is primarily fat loss, you'll need to eat less than your maintenance calories. Your mission is to find a number that lets you lose fat without making you feel hungry all the time, or lethargic – both of which sabotage your training (and limit the results you get from it). There are two main ways of figuring out what this calorie goal should be:

1. Most people take their estimated maintenance calories and subtract 300-500 from that. In a very simplified way, it takes a deficit of about 3500 calories to lose one pound of fat. So if you're in a deficit of 500 calories per day, that's 3500 in a week (or 1 pound of fat loss per week). There's nothing wrong with this approach, but it might not be the best option for you.

If your starting maintenance calories is around 3300 (like mine), reducing your daily calorie intake by 500 calories means a 15% reduction of calories. If, however, your maintenance calorie intake is 2000 and you subtract 500 from that, you're cutting your calorie intake by 25%. That's a drastic difference you may not be able to sustain for very long.

2. What makes more sense to me is using a percentage instead of a number range. People with higher energy requirements will lose fat but will still be able to eat proportionally more, and people with lower energy needs will have a deficit that's more suited to their overall lower calorie intake.

Here are 3 calorie deficit ranges and their pros and cons:

Large calorie deficit: Around 25% of your maintenance calories. Watch out for serious hunger, decreased athletic performance (and just finding it really hard to train in general), and a severely restricted diet. Yes, you'll likely lose weight at a faster rate than other less drastic deficits, but most people are so miserable on deficits like these that they don't maintain them long enough to see any appreciable results.

Medium calorie deficit: 15-20% of maintenance calories. This is much more sustainable but can still lead to losing 1 or 2 pounds of fat per week. Your training won't be adequately fuelled if you're serious about working out, so you may find that you don't make any progress at the gym – but you probably won't regress.

Small calorie deficit: 10-15% of maintenance calories. This is a good longer-term option for those who experience unbearable hunger or lethargy when cutting larger percentages of calories. It'll take longer to lose weight, but you'll be saner doing it.

My goal is massive muscle gainz

When your primary goal is to pack on muscle, you'll need to be in a calorie surplus for a period of time. As in, you need to eat more than your maintenance calories. If this calorie surplus is massive, you'll gain muscle as well as fat. If the surplus is smaller, you'll gain mostly muscle with relatively little fat (which is what the gym bro's call "lean bulking").

Again, this will take some experimentation. You need to find your own happy medium between packing on more fat than you'd like (too much of a surplus), and not gaining enough muscle (not enough surplus). Similar to those who are calculating a calorie deficit, there are two main approaches to being in a surplus:

1. Increase your maintenance calories by a certain percentage, and aim for that amount on a daily basis. For example, if your maintenance calorie number is 2000, you could start by increasing this by 10%. Your new goal, then, is 2200 calories per day.

2. Eat a larger calorie surplus only on training days. So you'd consume your maintenance calories on non-training days, and 500-600 calories extra (as a starting point) on training days. So, with our example of the 2000-calorie maintenance level, you'd eat 2000 calories on rest days, and 2500-2600 on training days.

In working with my clients, we lean toward a small to moderate calorie surplus (e.g. 10%) on a regular basis. This percentage will change depending on someone's body type, current fitness level and physique, goals, and more. It's easier to maintain consistent nutritional habits this way. Instead of having to eat quite a bit more food on training days and quite a bit less on rest days, you're eating about the same amount of food every day.

A 10% calorie surplus isn't very large, so there's less chance of gaining a whole bunch of fat along with the muscle you're building like you would if you were doing a faster "bulk". That would involve stuffing your face to gain a lot of weight, then going through a period of "cutting" where you try to shed the fat you've gained but keep the muscle. It may take a bit longer to get the muscle mass you're after compared to the "fast bulk" method, but you don't have to worry about feeling "fluffy" or having to severely cut calories down the road.

For more info on calculating calorie surpluses for muscle gain, check out [this article](#).

My goal is to stay at the same weight

Well then, carry on with your maintenance calories!

Calories and veganism

The concept of calories has nothing to do with veganism. You need a certain amount of energy to fuel your body whether you get it from vegan sources or not. However, you'll find that many healthy vegan food sources are not as high in calories as animal-based foods. Whole, plant-based foods tend to be nutrient-dense, rather than calorie-dense. What this means if you're trying to cut calories is the overall amount of food you eat might end up being more than your omnivorous friend, even though her total calorie goal is the same as yours.

And if you're trying to maintain or increase a high level of calories (like my 3000+ calories per day) for a very active lifestyle, muscle gain, and/or a high metabolism, you'll find that

you're stuffing your face very often throughout the day to hit your calorie target. Everyone knows me as the gal who never stops eating; I basically consider it my second full time job.

Wrapping things up on calories

Now that you have an estimate of your daily calorie goal, plug that into the MyFitnessPal app. Don't use the goal the app gives you; it's much less accurate!

Then log your food for a few days and see where you're at, calorie-wise. Are you at maintenance? Do you eat more in a day than you burn (this could lead to weight gain if maintained long-term)? Do you eat less in a day than you burn (this could lead to weight loss over time)? Focus on just the calorie numbers for now, before delving into even more detail with macros (up next).

Moving on to macros...

Before you start focusing on macronutrient ratios (the percentage of your diet that comes from carbs, fat, and protein), know that tracking macros is something for the fairly advanced fitness nut. Make sure you get really good at the foundational nutrition habits first, before you start focusing on macros.

Tracking (and tweaking) macros makes no sense if you're still working on getting out of your decades-old habit of drinking 2 cans of pop every day and only ever eating take-out for dinner.

You can start tracking macros if you've mastered the basics of healthy eating:

- You get about 80% of your calories from whole, nutrient-dense foods
- You feel like you have an overall healthy relationship with food
- You know your approximate daily calorie intake (logging your food for a few days will tell you this)

- ☑ You know your approximate daily calorie maintenance level and your daily calorie goal (if it's different from your maintenance level)
- ☑ 90% of the food you eat comes from the grocery store
- ☑ You regularly plan ahead for at least some of your meals and snacks

What the heck are macros, anyway?

When you hear fitness fanatics, gym bro's, athletes, and your friendly neighbourhood vegan fitness coach talk about "macros", what we mean is "macronutrients". Macros are the largest type of nutrient, and are required in large amounts in the human diet. They provide our bodies with energy, and each plays a different role within our bodies. (Micronutrients, on the other hand, we need in small amounts: vitamins and minerals.)

The foods you eat will contain different ratios of macronutrients. An apple, for example, is 100% carbohydrate. Coconut oil is 100% fat. Steamed edamame beans are 34% protein, 28% fat, and 38% carbohydrate.

What macro ratio is best for me?

As with most things in health and fitness, the answer is, "It depends". Most of my vegan nutrition coaching clients aim to get half their calories from carbohydrates (whole, nutrient-dense sources whenever possible), 25-30% from healthy fats, and 20-25% from protein.

This 50/30/20 breakdown is a good starting point, and can be tweaked as necessary. People who find they gain weight very easily may want to cut carbs down to 40%, while endurance athletes putting in many hours of cardiovascular training each week may perform better with higher carbohydrate percentages.

When it comes down to it, use 50/30/20 as a baseline, and experiment from there.

All sources of plant-based protein – other than pure protein powder – automatically come with carbohydrates and/or fats. Think beans, tempeh, and hemp hearts; they're great sources of plant-based protein, but also contain carbohydrates and fats. If you're vegan, focus most of your mental energy on getting in a good protein source with every meal, and the other macros typically take care of themselves.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Stay far, far away from extreme macro ratios like the 80/10/10 diet (that's 80% carbs, and only 10% fat and 10% protein), which is unfortunately popular in the vegan world, or keto (which includes only 5-10% of calories from carbs, and the majority of calories from fat).

There's no clinical evidence that these extreme diets work – and, in fact, there's evidence that they can be harmful. Example: eating anything less than 15% of your total calories from fat (like the 10% in the 80/10/10 diet) can seriously mess with your hormones.

PART 3: THE PROS AND CONS OF THE MYFITNESSPAL APP

The MyFitnessPal app provides all the nutritional information my clients need to ensure their diets are supporting (instead of detracting from) their health, fitness, and physique goals. However, the app ain't perfect.

MyFitnessPal is simple to use, includes a web version as well as a mobile version, and allows me to easily access my clients' food logs without them having to send me anything. My review below focuses on its "higher level" functionality as it relates to accurately logging our food, rather than addressing the user interface or the technical side of things.

MyFitnessPal: The pros

It's pretty user-friendly

This app is robust and user-friendly enough that I use it with all my vegan online coaching clients. It has its downsides (as you'll soon see, and as any app does), but it's a great tool to figure out where you're at nutritionally.

It has a big-ass database of foods

It's got a huge database of 3.2 million food items – including the weird vegan ones most non-vegans have never heard of! You can even scan the barcodes of most food packages and it'll automatically add those foods into your food log. You can create precise recipes and save them for later use, so you don't have to input each ingredient separately whenever you eat that food. You can also copy and paste entire meals.

You can use various types of measurements

You don't need to walk around with a kitchen scale, weighing every ingredient you eat. For my own food logs I use easy measurements like cups, tablespoons, and litres when inputting my foods, which are much easier to eyeball than grams. You have options when it comes to

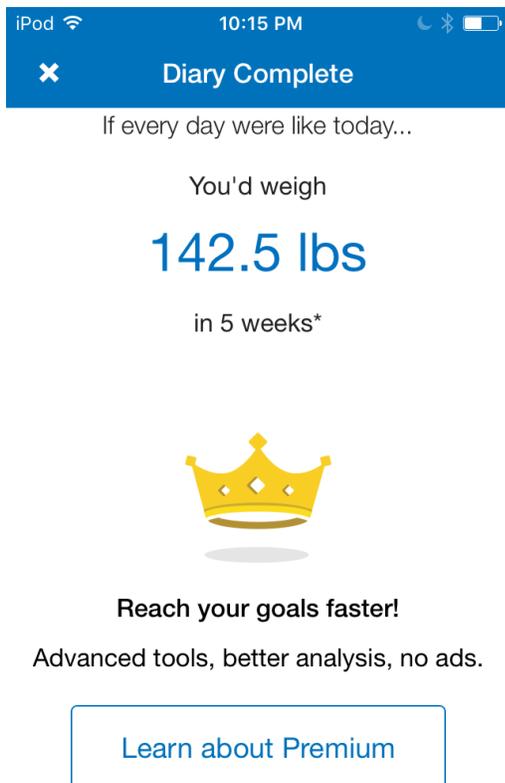
the types of measurements to use, including fluid ounces, weight, tablespoons/cups, and specific serving sizes of foods (e.g. three squares of Lindt dark chocolate, or half of a Nugo protein bar).

MyFitnessPal: the cons

Baseline calories are often underestimated

Most often, MyFitnessPal grossly underestimates its users' calorie requirements. It doesn't take nearly enough variables into account. For example, it tells me I should be eating 2000 calories per day to maintain my weight, when in fact that number is upwards of 3000. The calorie goal you get from the app doesn't include exercise, but there's absolutely no way I'm burning 1000 calories per day working out (see #3 below about accounting for exercise).

Highly inaccurate weight loss or gain predictions



The screenshot shows an iPod status bar at the top with the time 10:15 PM. Below it is a blue notification banner that says 'Diary Complete' with a close button (X). Underneath the banner, the text reads: 'If every day were like today... You'd weigh 142.5 lbs in 5 weeks*'. Below this is a yellow crown icon, followed by the text 'Reach your goals faster!' and 'Advanced tools, better analysis, no ads.' At the bottom of the notification is a blue button that says 'Learn about Premium'.

Check out this screenshot. Even though I've manually adjusted my daily calorie goal to my actual maintenance level (3000+), not what MyFitnessPal thinks it is (2000), it still uses its original extremely low calorie number to spout BS like this. I've weighed 125 pounds for at least 10 years. There's absolutely no way I'm gonna gain 17.5 pounds in 5 weeks by eating the way I normally do!

I understand that this type of notification could be useful for people trying to shed fat, but if you can't tell the app to use your much more accurate calorie goal for this calculation, it'll always be wildly inaccurate. I tell my clients to ignore this screen whenever they see it.

*Your projected weight loss is an estimate based on your total net calories for today. Actual results may vary.

You can't tell the app to ignore exercise...unless you upgrade

Keep in mind that the calorie goal you get from the app does not account for exercise. The idea is that if you exercise, those are “extra” calories you can consume on top of your baseline. Using my baseline (suggested by the app) of 2000 calories, if I were to expend 300 calories doing some strength training, my total “available” calories for that day would increase to 2300. Unfortunately, estimating calorie expenditure from exercise is likely even more of a guessing game than estimating daily calorie needs. There are countless important variables (e.g. body composition, genetics, current fitness level) that the app doesn't take into account.

So, I tell my clients to manually enter their daily calorie goal from [this](#) calculator, which includes exercise, and then not input their exercise into MyFitnessPal (we use a different app to track workouts and fitness progress).

User-generated food database items

The database of foods within the MyFitnessPal app is largely user-generated. The app puts a green checkmark symbol next to the foods it thinks have complete and accurate nutrition information, but these could still involve inaccuracies. This serves as another reminder that food logging isn't meant to be 100% exact. In Part 4 of this e-book, you can take a look at some of my own food logging and see what an active vegan who kicks other people's asses for a living eats in a day.

PART 4: MY 3000+ CALORIE PER DAY VEGAN DIET AND WHAT, EXACTLY, I EAT

I get a lot of questions from readers of my [book](#) and people I engage with on social media about what, exactly, I eat in a day. Those who know me in person know that I spend a huge amount of my time eating. After all, my appetite is so large that it has a persona of its own (years ago I named him Percival. It's his fault when leftovers my husband had been saving in our fridge mysteriously disappear).

Those who don't know me are often very surprised when they find out how much I eat. Out of those people, it's mostly females. Though I see the cultural approach (very slowly) changing for the better, we're still assailed with bullshit media messages about food restriction, cleanses and detoxes, cutting entire food groups out of our diets, and generally eating less to achieve the results we're after.

While portion control may be an important piece of your particular puzzle, it's extremely rare that I see a new vegan female client who severely overeats. Instead, a large proportion of my new clients don't eat *enough* to get the results they're after, and even if they do, they're often not eating the right types of foods (a focus on nutrient-dense whole foods, with macronutrient ratios appropriate to their fitness and physique goals).

If you want to look and perform like an athlete, you need to eat like one.

I can assure you that top-level athletes view their food as fuel. It's an essential part of their training plan, which also includes sleep and recovery. If you're not taking in enough fuel, or the right kind of fuel, you're not going to be performing at your best. I suggest you use food logging to practice becoming more mindful of what you're eating, and how it might be fuelling (or detracting from) your fitness and physique goals.

Now, I'm no pro athlete, of course. But I still view food as fuel for my lifestyle, chosen sports, and fitness and physique goals - and so should you!

Karina's lifestyle, chosen sports, and fitness & physique goals

Lifestyle:

I train clients on the gym floor 3 days a week, I work out up to 8 times a week, and I spend the rest of my time in my home office writing and working with online clients. My main hobby – music – is sedentary: playing accordion, piano, and Australian didgeridoo.

Chosen sports:

Weight lifting, swimming, jump rope (and playing a 25-pound accordion).

Fitness and physique goals:

Over my years of training I've focused mostly on performance and strength goals (e.g. being able to do 10 pull-ups in a row) and managing my scoliosis-related back pain. I'm naturally quite lean and need to work extremely hard to gain muscle. My goal for this coming year is to focus on hypertrophy (gaining muscle).

I happen to have a pretty active job, a lot of regular workouts during the week, and a turbocharged metabolism (thanks, genetics!) I'm no Olympic athlete, but based on my activities and my genetics, my body burns a ton of fuel.

By sharing my food logs I'm in no way prescribing these foods for anyone else. There's no singular "one size fits all" approach to health and fitness, so make sure you work with a qualified coach to ensure your nutrition (and training, for that matter) supports your goals.

Karina's nutrition-related stats

Vital stats:

Gender: Female

Height: 5'6"

Weight: 125 lbs

Age: 31



Nutrition stats:

Calorie goal: 3000 - 3300 calories per day

Macronutrient ratio goal: 50% carbs, 30% fat, 20% protein

Macronutrient gram goal: 375-437 grams of carbs, 100-116 grams of fats, and 150-175 grams of protein per day

How is Karina's diet different from that of most people of her gender and size?

OK, so I'm willing to bet most people don't eat two breakfasts, two lunches, and two dinners, plus snacks in between – unless they're 7-foot-tall strongmen competitors or professional sumo wrestlers. Most women my age and size don't eat upwards of 3000 calories per day.

That's because most people aren't on their feet all day at an active job, work out 8 times a week, and have a stunningly ridiculous metabolism.

So, I eat much more than most females my size – especially those with sedentary jobs. However, in the high-level fitness realm (a.k.a. fitness coaches whose second home is the gym and who take their own training seriously), this type of eating is much more common. Remember, food is fuel. If your body burns a lot of it, you're gonna need to eat a lot of it.

Being a high-calorie vegan means stuffing my face basically 24/7.

Plant-based food is nutrient-dense, not calorie-dense, so this means I'm eating very often. Based on the sheer amount of food I eat, I'm not at all worried about meeting any of my nutrient requirements. I eat 1.2 to 1.4 times the amount of protein a bodybuilder of my size would need, for example, and I usually get upwards of 140% of the iron I need.

However, I still use food logging very occasionally out of sheer curiosity (my calorie needs seem to be increasing each year!), and to make sure that I'm on track with my macros.

Sample food logs

Here's a 2-day sample of my food intake, logged using MyFitnessPal.

June 6, 2017

FOODS	Calories	Carbs	Fat	Protein	Cholest	Sodium	Sugars	Fiber
Breakfast 1								
No Name - Old Fashioned Rolled Oats, 0.5 cup (40 grams)	150	27g	3g	5g	0mg	5mg	1g	4g
Silk - Soy Milk - Original, 4 oz (1 cup)	55	5g	2g	4g	0mg	53mg	3g	1g
Assam - Tea, 1 cup	0	0g	0g	0g	0mg	0mg	0g	0g
Breakfast 2								
Berry/apple/flax/hemp/chia/oat smoothie, 1 serving(s)	522	62g	22g	22g	0mg	182mg	21g	16g
Omega Nutrition - Certified Organic Flax Oil, 2 tsp	80	0g	9g	0g	0mg	0mg	0g	0g
Homemade - Dried Apples, 0.75 cup (86g)	69	17g	0g	0g	0mg	16mg	10g	0g
Nature's Path Organic - Flax Plus Waffle, 2 waffles	200	30g	8g	4g	0mg	330mg	5g	5g
Adams (Canada) - 100% Natural Creamy Peanut Butter, 32 g (1 tbsp)	200	6g	16g	6g	0mg	110mg	2g	2g
Generic - Fleischmanns Lactose Free Margarine, 2 tsp	70	0g	8g	0g	0mg	80mg	0g	0g
North Coast Naturals - Brown Rice Protein, 2 tbsp	150	4g	2g	26g	0mg	20mg	0g	1g
Lunch 1								
Homemade Ginger Beer (+ agave & lemon), 1 serving(s)	88	20g	0g	0g	0mg	18mg	18g	0g
Light Life - Soy Tempeh, 2 oz.	115	8g	4g	11g	0mg	5mg	1g	6g
Sunrise - Tofu Puffs, 60 g	180	2g	14g	12g	0mg	1mg	0g	1g
Generic - Sesame Tahini, 1 Tbsp (28 g)	100	2g	9g	3g	0mg	38mg	0g	1g
San-j - Organic Tamari, 1 Tbsp	10	0g	0g	2g	0mg	940mg	0g	0g
Beets, raw, 1 beet (2	35	8g	0g	1g	0mg	64mg	6g	2g
Carrots, raw, 0.5 cup chopped	26	6g	0g	1g	0mg	44mg	3g	2g
Mushrooms - Raw, 1 cup, pieces or slices	15	2g	0g	2g	0mg	3mg	1g	1g
Cucumber - Cucumbers, 50 g	8	2g	0g	0g	0mg	1mg	1g	0g
Red Star - Nutritional Yeast, 2.25 tsp	70	6g	1g	8g	0mg	11mg	0g	4g
Cabbage, napa, cooked, 0.5 cup	7	1g	0g	1g	0mg	6mg	0g	0g
Beans - Black, 0.75 Cup	170	31g	1g	11g	0mg	2mg	0g	11g
Safeway - Salsa, 2 T	10	2g	0g	0g	0mg	190mg	1g	0g
Rice - Brown, long-grain, cooked, 0.5 cup	108	22g	1g	3g	0mg	5mg	0g	2g
Lunch 2								
Manny'S - Tortilla- Whole Wheat, 2 tortilla	340	56g	8g	10g	0mg	1,000mg	2g	6g
Generic - Red Lentils Cooked, 25 g	29	5g	0g	2g	0mg	1mg	0g	2g
Oil - Olive, 1 tablespoon	119	0g	14g	0g	0mg	0mg	0g	0g
Herbs - Green Onion, Raw, 1 stalk (15g)	5	1g	0g	0g	0mg	2mg	0g	0g
Silk Soy Milk - Chai, 1 cup	130	19g	4g	6g	0mg	100mg	14g	0g
Dinner 1								
Simply Protein (Canada) - Spicy Chili Chips 33g pkg., 1 bag	140	11g	4g	15g	0mg	320mg	2g	1g
Nugo - Dark Mint Chocolate Chip Protein Bar, 1 Bar	200	29g	5g	10g	0mg	160mg	14g	1g
Dinner 2								
Homemade - Vegan Garbanzo Veggie Minestrone, 1 bowl	140	14g	6g	8g	0mg	600mg	5g	3g
Saltines - Saltines, 10 crackers	120	22g	3g	2g	0mg	280mg	0g	0g
Arugula - Arugula, 0.5 Cup (raw)	2	0g	0g	0g	0mg	3mg	0g	0g
Mushrooms, white, raw, 0.25 cup, pieces or slices	4	1g	0g	1g	0mg	1mg	0g	0g
Homemade Ginger Beer (+ agave & lemon), 1.25 serving(s)	109	25g	0g	0g	0mg	22mg	23g	0g
Lindt Excellence - Chocolat Noire 70%, 1.0 squares	57	3g	4g	1g	0mg	3mg	3g	1g
TOTAL:	3,833	449g	148g	177g	0mg	4,616mg	136g	73g

Totals from this day:

Calories: 3833

Macro ratio: 47% carbs, 35% fat, 18% protein (rounded to nearest whole number)

Macro grams: 449 g carbs, 148 g fats, 177 g protein

Note that I'm not concerned if my macros or calories aren't exactly on target based on my goal numbers. I eat an extremely varied diet so every day will be different. Also, note that even though I got only 18% of my calories from protein, it's still 177 grams, which is much more than even a bodybuilder of my size would need.

April 16, 2017

FOODS	Calories	Carbs	Fat	Protein	Cholest	Sodium	Sugars	Fiber
Breakfast 1								
No Name - Old Fashioned Rolled Oats, 0.5 cup (40 grams)	150	27g	3g	5g	0mg	5mg	1g	4g
Sun Warrior - Protein Raw Vegan Vanilla, 21 grams (1 scoop)	100	0g	2g	19g	0mg	320mg	0g	2g
Silk - Soy Milk - Original, 6 oz (1 cup)	83	7g	3g	6g	0mg	79mg	5g	2g
Breakfast 2								
Nature's Path Organic - Flax Plus Waffle, 2 waffles	200	30g	8g	4g	0mg	330mg	5g	5g
Adams (Canada) - 100% Natural Creamy Peanut Butter, 32 g (1 tbsp)	200	6g	16g	6g	0mg	110mg	2g	2g
Generic - Fleischmanns Lactose Free Margarine, 2 tsp	70	0g	8g	0g	0mg	80mg	0g	0g
Primal Strips - meatless vegan jerky-Texas BBQ, 29 grams	81	11g	1g	10g	0mg	383mg	5g	1g
Assam - Black Tea (No Milk or Sugar), 8 fl oz	0	0g	0g	0g	0mg	0mg	0g	0g
Silk - Soy Milk - Original, 2 oz (1 cup)	28	2g	1g	2g	0mg	26mg	2g	1g
Lunch 1								
Berry/apple/flax/hemp chia/oat smoothie, 1 serving(s)	522	62g	22g	22g	0mg	182mg	21g	16g
Lunch 2								
Lotus Foods - Purple Potato and Brown Rice Ramen, 1 ramen w/ seasoning	300	64g	3g	6g	0mg	720mg	2g	4g
Dinner 1								
Homemade - Coconut Curry Sauce, 1 cup	140	14g	8g	5g	0mg	0mg	6g	8g
Indian - Aloo Gobi, 1 cup	300	38g	10g	8g	0mg	100mg	0g	10g
yoso - coconut yogurt unsweetened, 126 g	130	14g	9g	1g	0mg	15mg	1g	7g
Homemade - Broiled Grapefruit, 1 fruit	282	56g	12g	1g	31mg	93mg	37g	3g
Lindt - Chocolat Noir 70%, 3 squares (10 g)	160	10g	12g	2g	0mg	20mg	8g	2g
the Ginger People - Crystallized Ginger, 24 g (about 4 pieces)	80	19g	0g	0g	0mg	35mg	18g	0g
Yves - Veggie Meatballs, 135 gram	270	16g	11g	27g	0mg	855mg	2g	5g
Generic - Papadum, 2 wafer	60	4g	4g	2g	0mg	250mg	0g	0g
TOTAL:	3,156	380g	133g	126g	31mg	3,603mg	115g	72g

Totals from this day:

Calories: 3156

Macro ratio: 48% carbs, 38% fat, 16% protein (rounded to nearest whole number)

Macro grams: 380 g carbs, 133 g fats, 126 g protein

Food logging will never be 100% accurate. It's meant to give you ballpark figures to see if you're on the right track.

Example #1 of inaccuracy: The sodium content shown in my June 6th food log is much higher than what it is in reality. I didn't want to take the time to create a new recipe entry in the app for the soup my husband made, so I chose a user-generated "homemade vegan garbanzo veggie minestrone" instead. It still gives me ballpark figures for macros and calories, but is far higher in sodium than our version.

Example #2 of inaccuracy: The cholesterol content of a broiled grapefruit (see "Dinner 1" on April 16) should be zero. No vegan foods contain cholesterol! Perhaps the food database entry for this item contained butter. Either way, you'll often see inaccuracies like this.

What did I learn from my food logs?

Since I've logged my food regularly (a few days every few months) for a number of years, there wasn't much to be surprised by. I did notice my protein intake was a bit lower than normal, based just on percentage of calories. If I didn't eat such a high amount of food (e.g. 2000 calories instead of well over 3000), then I'd be more concerned about getting a slightly higher percentage of my calories from protein. My totals were still 177 grams and 126 grams from my 2 days of food logging, which is well above what a 125-pound strength athlete needs.

Need some plant-based nutrition guidance? Confused by food logging and want help? Want some of my top secret vegan recipes and food prep hacks? Want to make sure you're effectively fuelling your fitness?

Check out my [nutrition coaching sessions](#).

BUDDHA BOWL FOOD PREP: A WEEK'S WORTH OF VEGAN DINNERS

...in 60 minutes or less

YOUR OVERALL ACTION PLAN

You're going to prepare several different ingredients and store them in separate containers. Your food will have a longer shelf life this way, instead of storing fully assembled Buddha bowls. When you're ready to eat, it'll take about 5 minutes to assemble your bowl. You can then eat it as is, or heat in a microwave for 3 minutes.

Plan ahead so you can have an hour available to focus only on food prep for the coming week. Start with a clean kitchen, have all your equipment ready to go and your ingredients purchased, and be sure to read through these instructions beforehand.

You can make this as simple or as elaborate as you like. I went pretty hardcore and used a total of 16 ingredients (you can certainly use fewer), but it still took me only 55 minutes to prepare. Also keep in mind that the more often you make Buddha bowls, the faster you'll get at preparing them (full disclosure: I make them a lot so I've got lots of practice!)

FOUR IMPORTANT NOTES

NOTE #1: My 60-minute timeframe assumes that you'll be using a food processor. If you don't have one and need to chop your veggies by hand, it'll take a bit longer.

NOTE #2: All amounts are for one person. If you're preparing meals for two, double all amounts.

NOTE #3: Consider this guide as just that – a guide. It's not an exact recipe to follow, and you can use any plant-based protein source and any veggies you fancy. I'm showing you what I do and the ingredients I use merely as a starting point.

NOTE #4: With only an hour of food prep for the whole week, we're making the assumption that you're OK with eating the same thing for dinner for a week. However, unlike other pre-made meals, you have lots of opportunity to switch things up throughout the week if you use slightly different toppings each day. For example, alternate between tofu and tempeh for your main protein, use cashews + almonds as a topping one day and hemp hearts + crispy onion the next, etc. Or you can enjoy the exact same Buddha bowl 7 times in a row if you're a serious creature of routine. Up to you!

KITCHEN EQUIPMENT YOU'LL NEED

- Large pot with well-fitting lid
- Blender
You'll need this to make smooth dressing.
- Large smoothie cup or screw-top jar
- 5-8 large airtight storage containers
- 1 small airtight storage container
- 1 medium bowl
- Food processor
Note that you don't *have* to have a food processor to make this meal, but it greatly cuts down the time involved. I use a simple [Cuisinart 8-cup food processor](#).
- Cutting board and chef's knife

YOUR GROCERY LIST

- 3 cups uncooked quinoa or brown rice
- 2 large cans beans of your choice
- 1 jar salsa
- 1 bunch green onion
- 1 package cherry tomatoes
- 1 large cucumber, or 5 mini cucumbers
- Smoked tofu, tofu puffs, and/or tempeh (7 servings total)
- 6 carrots
- 4 beets
- 1/2 small Napa cabbage
- 1/2 head cauliflower
- 1 package pre-washed greens (e.g. arugula, baby kale, spinach)

STAPLES TO HAVE ON HAND

(ADD TO GROCERY LIST IF NEEDED)

- Nutritional yeast
- Tamari or soy sauce
- Apple cider vinegar or rice vinegar
- Garlic (3 cloves)
- Olive oil
- Tahini
- Black pepper

YOUR EASY FOOD PREP STEPS

1. In a large pot, cook 3 cups (dry) **quinoa or brown rice** as per package directions. This will give you just under a cup of grain per meal for the week. If you need larger serving sizes, use 4 cups of dry grain instead.

2. While quinoa or brown rice is cooking, prepare **Buddha bowl dressing**. Just throw all these ingredients into a blender, and blend! I make mine in a smoothie container with a handheld immersion blender. The smoothie container is an easy way to store this dressing for the week; it's the perfect size and pours easily.

[Dressing adapted from [Whitewater Cooks](#)]

- 1 cup nutritional yeast flakes
- 2/3 cup water
- 1/3 cup tamari or soy sauce
- 1/3 cup apple cider vinegar or rice vinegar
- 3 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup tahini
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste

3. Rinse canned **beans**. Place in storage container and mix with **salsa**.

4. Chop **green onion** and store in small storage container.

5. Rinse **cherry tomatoes** and store in a bowl (they don't need to be refrigerated). You may want them handy to snack on, anyway!

6. Slice **cucumbers** into rounds and store in large storage container. Note: cucumbers don't last as long as other veggies, so you may need to slice up a second batch halfway through the week.

7. If you're using **smoked tofu**, dice it into cubes. **Tempeh strips** and **tofu puffs** can be stored in their original packaging, placed into a plastic bag or large Ziploc.

8. Now you'll prepare your main veggie ingredients. Use your food processor to grate or slice **carrots, beets, Napa cabbage, cauliflower**, or any other veggies you'd like to use. I don't bother to peel my carrots or beets, and first cut them into medium-sized chunks so they fit into the food processor's chute.

Store veggies separately in large airtight storage containers.

YOUR PREP IS DONE!

5-MINUTE BUDDHA BOWL ASSEMBLY FOR MEALS

1. Place **brown rice or quinoa** in bottom of bowl.

2. Top with prepared **carrots, beets, cauliflower, black beans with salsa**, and **tofu/tempeh** of choice.

3. If you want a warm meal, add **dressing** and heat in microwave, then top with **green onion**, your **greens** of choice, **cherry tomatoes**, and **cucumber** slices. Otherwise pile everything into your bowl and your feast is ready.

If you're packing Buddha bowls for lunches at work, take 5 minutes in the morning to assemble one in a portable container. I pack my dressing separately in a small screw-top container and add right before eating.

TOPPING IDEAS

- Sauerkraut
- Crispy onions
- Arugula
- Green radish or daikon radish
- Hemp hearts
- Slivered almonds
- Shredded nori seaweed
- Pumpkin seeds
- Sunflower seeds
- Cashews
- Peanuts
- Walnuts
- Kimchi
- Avocado



One of my recent Buddha bowl creations. Includes white kidney beans, arugula, sauerkraut, cucumber, carrots, beets, Napa cabbage, cherry tomatoes, smoked tempeh, jackfruit, green onions, and crispy onions on a bed of brown rice.

OTHER PROTEIN SOURCES TO TRY

- Pan fried seitan
- Veggie meatballs (e.g. Yves brand)
- Veggie ground round
- Gardein brand faux meat (e.g. "Mandarin Chick'n")
- Edamame beans
- Chickpeas
- Brown, green, or red lentils

OTHER BASES TO TRY (INSTEAD OF QUINOA/BROWN RICE)

- Farro
- Spelt
- Amaranth

OTHER VEGGIES TO TRY

- Mushrooms
- Purple cabbage
- Daikon radish
- Red/green/yellow peppers
- Snow peas
- Asparagus
- Fennel
- Broccoli
- Zucchini

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AN EXAMPLE OF KARINA'S OWN BUDDHA BOWLS

Here are the 16 ingredients I used last time I made Buddha bowls. I never make the same Buddha bowls 2 weeks in a row! With countless options for grain bases, veggies, protein sources, and toppings, you'll never get bored of this meal.



- | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. White kidney beans + salsa | 6. Napa cabbage | 12. Mini cucumber |
| 2. Sauerkraut | 7. Arugula + spinach | 13. Smoked tempeh |
| 3. Jackfruit | 8. Green radish | 14. Carrots |
| 4. Green onion | 9. Brown rice | 15. Cauliflower |
| 5. Buddha bowl dressing | 10. Grape tomatoes | 16. Beets |
| | 11. Crispy onions | |

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Founder of the [KI Healthy Living Academy](#), Karina Inkster is your go-to vegan health and fitness coach, providing a friendly kick in the butt that inspires and motivates you to live your best, healthiest, most plant-strong life.

Author, speaker, award-winning and certified online coach, and lover of chin-ups, Karina works tirelessly to ensure her clients skyrocket their energy, confidence, and plant-based health superpowers. (Wanna become a client? [Apply here.](#))

In fancier terms, she's a Certified Personal Training Specialist and Certified Online Trainer with a Master's degree in Gerontology, specializing in health and aging. She works with vegans and vegetarians - and those interested in becoming plant-based. She's been vegan since 2003 and vegetarian since 1998.

Karina is the author of 2 books and 2 e-books, the creator of 2 online courses, and a regular writer for [alive Magazine](#) and the online magazine [LifetimeDaily.com](#).

What does Karina do when she's not kicking her clients' butts, working out, writing, or eating dark chocolate? She plays accordion, piano, and Australian didgeridoo, bakes mind-blowing vegan treats, and sneaks spinach into her husband's smoothies.

