Sports Nutrition for Mixed Martial Arts

By Drew Griffiths (BSc, MSc)

Please diet and exercise with caution and at your own risk
Introduction

Athletes are often concerned with dietary manipulations in the period around competition. However, the main role of nutrition may be to support consistent intensive training which will lead to improved performance. Meeting energy demand and maintaining body mass and body fat at optimal levels are key goals.

Often overlooked elements of Sports Nutrition however, include optimal dietary requirements for health, minimal systemic and muscular inflammation and enhanced immune function. A general feeling of wellbeing and energy are undervalued in Sports Nutrition but are fundamental for performance.

Nutritional Goals should include:

Maintaining energy supply to working muscles and other tissues

Promoting tissue adaptation, growth and repair

Promoting immune function

Reducing inflammation – a crucial marker in association with both recovery and general health.

Disclaimer – Consult your Doctor before adopting any dietary changes
Caveat for this book

Throughout my time as a student, reading Sport & Exercise Science at Loughborough and Nutrition Science at Chester; I was taught that fat was ‘bad’ and carbohydrates were ‘good’. As athletes, we were encouraged to drink carbohydrate drinks with meals for extra calories.

To be fair, the high-carbohydrate protocol is supported by a large amount of research, showing that for sports such as rugby, football and boxing, it can improve performance, at least in the short term.

**Inflammation**

High carbohydrate diets, particularly high sugar diets (and other high glycaemic carbohydrates) can in some individuals, cause high levels of inflammation. Inflammation is directly linked to depression, physical diseases and poor recovery from physical activity. Again, in some, inflammation is heightened when processed foods, dairy and/or wheat is consumed.

**Do what works for you**

If you feel great, and you are full of energy and focus on a high carbohydrate diet, then great, carry on. In fact, there is a high-carbohydrate diet-plan included in this book, as research shows it can improve performance.

If however you are suffering any symptoms of high levels of inflammation, and/or high any gut problems like IBS, then consider switching to a diet with no sugar, no processed foods, and high levels of healthy fats, like those found in coconut milk, olive oil and fish.

Removing whole food groups from your diet, like dairy and/or wheat is controversial, and many doctors would be against it. I however found that removing dairy from my diet completely, literally changed my life and increased my energy levels dramatically. I would recommend listening to the arguments for and against the likes of dairy, carbohydrates, ketogenic diets etc and make your own mind up. The [Ted X talks on youtube](https://www.youtube.com/tedtalks) are a good place to start.
**Gut Health**

“All disease begins in the gut.” – Hippocrates

When looking to optimise health and performance through nutrition; gut health is often ignored in favour of nutrition immediately before and after exercise.

Inflammation often starts in the gut, and can lead to low energy levels, injury and burn-out. Importantly too – over 50% of the body’s immune system is in your gut, so you need to take care of it.

Here are some tips for improving gut health:

- Improve the profile of your gut flora by consuming fermented foods and a probiotic supplement

- Again, improve your gut flora profile by reducing sugary, high GI carbs (except for after exercise)

- Drink glutamine on an empty stomach, first thing in the morning if ‘leaky gut’ syndrome is suspected

- Drink organic, apple cider vinegar – a tablespoon (or more, assess your tolerance) in water, drunk about 15 minutes before a meal improves digestion dramatically in most people.

- Gingko Biloba and NAC powder have personally helped with the IBS that I had. Gingko has a multitude of health benefits, but can thin the blood (usually not a bad thing), and increase the likelihood of a bleed on the brain

After giving up dairy and sugar I saw the biggest improvements in IBS
General Eating Habits

If you take one message away from this book, please remember that Sports Nutrition starts with healthy nutrition, organic whole foods, preferably cooked from scratch. If you are eating protein bars full of additives and collagen, you are just being duped by Sports Nutrition marketing.

Omega 3 to Omega 6 ratio
Western diets are full of Omega 6 fats, and highly processed, heated fats, that cause inflammation. Omega 6 causes inflammation, which is the enemy for recovery and general health. The easiest way to adjust this balance is to supplement with fish oil and cook with coconut oil, instead of vegetable oils. EPA is the anti-inflammatory element of omega 3. Look for fish oil (and krill oil) high in EPA.

Probiotic Foods
Back in the day, we had dairy from one cow, it was raw, untreated etc. and full of goodness. Nowadays the milk (and most other products) come from about 1,000 cows, mass milked, full of drugs to make them produce more milk and anti-biotics to stop them getting infections, the milk has to be heated to 97 degrees so it doesn’t kill us...what you end up with, is a product that is on a different level (a lower one) to what our great, great grandparents and their mates drank.
If the balance of bacteria in our gut isn’t right, we’ll feel slugish and generally less awesome. Look to get some of these in your diet:
raw honey, miso soup, kefir, dark chocolate, sauerkraut, kombucha tea (might be a bit on the yeasty side for some people), pickles and olives.

**High Quality Carbohydrates**
Include sweet potatoes, buckwheat, quinoa and oats. Avoid sugar and High Glyceamic carbs, except for post-training, as sugar is highly inflammatory. More on this later....

**Coconut milk and/or oil for extra calories**
If you are struggling to consume enough calories try adding coconut milk to a smoothie with hemp seeds and fruit. Most commercial coconut milk, is 95% water and about 3% coconut milk. For extra calories get pure coconut milk, or as near as possible to pure coconut milk – try the tins, rather than the cartons of coconut milk, which tend to be watered down. Nuts have also been used in the past for extra calories, however recent research suggests that the human body is only able to assimilate around 50% of the calories found in nuts.

**Experiment with Dairy and Wheat Free**
It’s not for everyone, but try it for a week and see how your body and digestive system feels. Dairy is also known to cause inflammation in many people.

**Experiment with Alkaline Foods**
Some nutritionists claim that alkaline diets are superior for health and also endurance. Try adding wheatgrass and spirulina to your diet, and minimise the consumption of citrus fruits.

**Consume natural anti-inflammatories**
Eat more:
Ginger, Tumeric, Garlic, Onions, Red cabbage
High magnesium foods such as spinach, squash and pumpkin seeds and fish such as Mackerel
Try Pineapple for its bromelain content (you can also buy bromelain as a supplement)
Eat/Consume less:
Alcohol, caffeine, deep fried foods, artificial sweeteners and
additives, sugar, vegetable cooking oils, dairy & processed meats as these can cause high levels of inflammation. Nightshade fruits such as tomatoes are also linked to high levels of inflammation. Consider cutting down on these if suffering with knee, back or any joint inflammation.

**Consume fresh, whole foods, in their original state if possible**
Take table salt for example – consume sea salt or Himalayan salt, not table salt that has been bleached.
Another example – eat organic, grass fed beef, not processed meat.
Eat organic food, that’s as fresh and ‘unprocessed’ as possible.

**Supplements**

An ideal diet would contain largely raw foods, and no supplements. Having said that, in practical terms, I still think there is a place for supplements:

**Protein Powder – Consume Daily & Post-Training**
One of the most aggressively contested topics in nutrition is related to protein consumption. How much people need, and whether or not it is bad for the kidneys. Research suggests that animal protein
consumed in large quantities is possibly harmful. Looking at further research, which is the only thing you can really do, it is recommended that athletes consume between 0.6g and 1.2g of protein per pound of bodyweight. Whey, egg or hemp protein powder are usually recommended.

Research does also suggest that consuming protein after training increases muscle mass and when taken during rehab, can increase recovery rate. I would personally recommend hemp protein, but any protein powder should be consumed as a supplement to a healthy diet, and ideally use unflavoured protein powder, make a smoothie with the likes of kale, ginger, spinach, flaxseed and coconut oil.

There a large body of research suggesting that leucine content is important in regards to the protein-synthesis that a particular protein source promotes. Whey protein has the highest concentration of leucine. Interestingly however, the research into leucine has been largely funded by the Dairy Council (making some people very cynical about the claims related to it), and it has also been linked to accelerated tumour growth.

Hemp seeds, blended with other whole-foods make a great alternative to protein powders. Quinoa can also be used.

**Medium Chain Triglycerides (MCTs)**
Found naturally in coconuts, MCTs can provide extra calories when required and possess many health benefits.

**Creatine – Consume Daily – Ideally Post-Training**
Creatine monohydrate, consumed with simple carbohydrates such as dextrose have been shown in dozens of studies to enhance intermittent high intensity exercise performance. Research suggests ‘loading’ (taking 20g of creatine a day for 5 days) is not necessary. Instead consume 3g a day with 20-30g of dextrose or another simple carbohydrate such as maltodextrin. Post-training is the ideal time to consume a drink containing creatine and carbohydrate. Research also suggests that consuming 1000mg of alpha lipoic acid immediately before consuming a creatine/carbohydrate drink, enhancing skeletal muscle uptake.

**Acetyl-L-Carnitine – Consume pre-training / fight**
Great caffeine free supplement for enhancing mental power and
physical energy. Try a small amount to begin with, as it can cause stomach upset if you are not used to it. I use 200mg for an endurance boost, but others advocate 2-3g. Please note, although prior research suggested that L-carnitine was good for the heart, recent research suggests it may change gut bacteria if used frequently, which in turn can accelerate atherosclerosis.

**Beta Alanine – Consume pre-training / fight**
This amino acid raises carnosine levels, which helps to buffer the influence of H+ ions which cause acidity and fatigue. Watch out for the tingling!

**Caffeine – Consume pre-training / fight**
Some experts state that caffeine, taken for prolonged periods at high dosages can lead to adrenal fatigue. Either way, it does dramatically enhance endurance.
Caffeine can be consumed with beta alanine or acetyl l carnitine. Caffeine is relatively safe; however I was unable to find any research on the safety of long term use of beta alanine or acetyl l carnitine.

**Carbohydrate & Electrolyte Drinks**
Important to consume during and after training and fights. You can make your own using maltodextrin powder and adding a pinch of salt.

**Fish Oil**
Look for fish oil with a high EPA content. This is the element of omega 3 that has anti-inflammatory properties. Supplement with 1 to 15g per day depending on the EPA content and your own muscle and joint soreness.

**Gingko Biloba**
A great anti-inflammatory supplement that also enhances mental performance. If you are looking to increase energy levels, mental focus and/or enhance recovery rate, consider supplementing with Ginkgo Biloba.

**Greens Powders**
If you struggle eating enough organic fruit & vegetables, consider supplementing with ‘greens’ powders such as wheatgrass and spirulina.
**Leucine**
There is some research to suggest that Leucine greatly enhances protein synthesis via the mTor pathway – however there is also research to state the it increases the growth & division of cancer cells. So use with caution.

**Beetroot Juice**
Research suggests drinking around 140ml (2 shots of ‘Beet-it’ shots of beetroot juice, 2-3 hours before an endurance ‘event’ can significantly decrease blood pressure, and increase endurance, thanks to the nitrites. Again, use with caution, as unfortunately a high consumption of nitrites, is linked to an increased prevalence of some cancers.

**Taurine**
If you ‘suffer’ from pumped up muscles, stiff shoulders when striking and/or pumped forearms when grappling, that weaken your grip, then taurine may very well help. Consume 3g about 30 mins before training. Do not take at the same time as beta alanine, as they will compete for absorption
Adaptogens

Adaptogens are a group of herbs and foods that are able to offset some of the effects of physical and mental stress on the body.

If you are struggling to recover in between training sessions, then they are worth considering as part of your nutritional regime.

Korean Ginseng
The most famous adaptogen there is. Stacks of research to show that this herb increases immune functioning and reduces fatigue. 
Study

Rhodiola Rosea
Rhodiola rosea is a flowering plant, which resides in all the ridiculously cold regions of the world. Including Iceland, North America, the Artic and the UK. It has been showed to reduce fatigue and enhance mental clarity. Study

Ashwagandha
Also known as ‘Indian Ginseng’, this herb is a powerful antioxidant. Studies suggest that this herb not only reduced stress and cortisol levels, it also ‘fights’ cancer. It is also a strong anti-inflammatory, suggesting that it will help enhance recovery. Study
Natural Testosterone Boosters

**Fenugreek**
It won’t make a huge difference to testosterone levels but can make you feel more vitality and perhaps help with recovery. Buy the powder from an Asian food store, not an overpriced supplement version. More info [here](#).

**Mucuna pruriens AKA Velvet Bean**
Use sparingly, as these herb also affects dopamine levels. Taken at night time, it also results in crazy dreams! More info [here](#).

**Zinc**
Ideally add zinc to your diet by consuming zinc-rich foods such as spinach.

Don’t expect too much from natural testosterone boosters, they’ll mainly have an effect when a person’s baseline levels are low.

Note – as far as I am aware none of the adaptogens, supplements or herbs listed above are banned by the FA, IOC or FIFA, but please check with your manager or governing body.
The Glycemic Index

The Glycemic Index (GI) is basically an update to the concept of simple and complex carbohydrates. It is a measure of how quickly carbohydrates raise blood sugar level following consumption. It is relative to pure glucose. For example, if a piece of white bread has a GI of 70 – it would indicate that white bread raises blood sugar at a rate 70% as much as pure glucose; over a 2 hour period.

Generally an athlete should look to consume foods with a GI of 60 or below. It is important to note however, that as low GI foods take longer to digest, than can cause GI distress in some individuals. It is also less practical to get all of an athlete’s carbohydrate requirements purely from low GI carbohydrates. A mixture of GI types/scores is therefore often recommended. GI has little impact on carbohydrate loading.

The Glycemic Load (GL) is a number that estimates how much a food will raise a person’s blood sugar level by. High GL foods, like high GI foods cause blood sugar to rise rapidly. Very high GL foods should ideally only be consumed within 2 hours after a training session or fight.
GI aside, appropriate timing of carbohydrate intake is also vital. Research has shown that carbohydrate supplementation during soccer matches has been found to result in muscle glycogen sparing (39%), greater second-half running distances, and more goals being scored with less conceded, when compared to consumption of water. Carbohydrate supplementation has been recommended prior to, during, and after matches.
In a separate study, movement analysis of a 4-a-side indoor soccer game lasting 90 min was undertaken following 48 h of high (approx. 8 g/kg/day) or moderate (approx. 3 g/kg/day) carbohydrate intake. The high-carbohydrate diet increased muscle glycogen by 38% and allowed soccer players to complete approximately 33% more high-intensity work during the game.

If you weigh 80kg, 8g per kg per day is 640g of carbohydrate and 2560 calories just from carbohydrate. This is a lot of carbohydrate to eat daily! This is especially true if you rely on whole foods, with low GI properties to be the primary source of carbohydrate in your diet. Smoothies and drinks are a great way to get more carbohydrate in an athlete’s diet, whilst minimizing GI discomfort and bloating.

To ensure that the ideal amount of calories are being consumed, a coach should monitor the team’s body fat percentage, and waist circumference. An athlete can work out their approximate calorie requirements by doing the following:

– First start by working out Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR) using the below equation (or just use an online ‘BMR calculator’):

**For men:** BMR = 10 x weight (kg) + 6.25 x height (cm) – 5 x age (years) + 5
**For women:** BMR = 10 x weight (kg) + 6.25 x height (cm) – 5 x age (years) – 161

– Then use the Harris Benedict Formula, to work out your calorie requirements, based on your physical activity levels:
– If you exercise 1-3 days a week, x your BMR by 1.375
– 3-5 days a week BMR x 1.55
– 6-7 days a week BMR x 1.725
– if you have a physical job and train most days, BMR x 1.9

I’m 5ft 10, 200lbs and train about 4 times a week. So my calorie requirement would be 3060 calories.

Author’s note – Although research suggests a high carbohydrate diet is the mainstay of any athlete’s diet and results in an enhanced athletic performance in most sports lasting longer than 60 seconds; consuming a vast amount of carbohydrate every day, may cause inflammation and not be the best for long term health. To offset any negative health effects of ‘sugary’ carbohydrates; consume high GI
carbohydrates within 2 hours of training and the day before a fight.

Some nutritionists and recent research suggests that eating fats from nuts, fish and hemp for example, may be a more healthy way to reach calorific needs day to day. Then 2 days before a fight or competition increase carbohydrate intake and decrease fat intake to load the muscles and liver with glycogen (carbohydrate). See the next section on Ketogenic diets.

**Example High Carb Meal Plan**

8am – High protein porridge (oats, ground almonds, banana, coconut milk, raw honey) - 350 calories

10am-12pm training – Consume maltodextrin drink during training (150 calories)

12pm – Protein & carbohydrate drink (30g whey/hemp protein, 10g flaxseed, 10g coconut oil, 10g oats) + banana – 350 calories

1pm – Jacket potato / sweet potato, tuna, salad with olive oil or hemp oil & handful of almonds. Raw Cacao chocolate bar. – 750 calories

3pm – Super Lazy Smoothie*  
Handful of mixed nuts – 500 calories

6pm – Main meal – Noodle stir fry* - 500 calories

8pm – Handful of mixed nuts & glass of coconut milk (unsweetened & no additives) – 250 calories

9pm – Rice cake with peanut butter – 200 calories

Consume at least 2 litres of water (preferably filtered and with a pinch of Himalayan salt OR coconut water)  
*See recipes

The 2 days leading up to a fight, the nuts should be replaced with a
high carbohydrate snack.
Experiment with meals and carbohydrate content of day to day meals during the off season, and monitor the effect on performance and energy levels.

The quality of the meal plan and the nutritional content depends largely on how the food is sourced. For example, if the 1pm salad contains homegrown organic watercress, spinach, carrots and tomatoes, it will have many more micronutrients than a pre-packaged salad bought from a high street store.

This applies to all the food in the meal plan. Peanut butter for example should be organic, and contain no added sugar or preservatives, just peanuts and a small amount of added oil. Honey should be raw and not a ‘blend’ of filtered honey. Manuka honey is regarded as the most nutritious, but is also very expensive.
Ketogenic Diet

**This is where it gets somewhat confusing.** A growing number of nutritionists and athletes are now recommending ketogenic diets over high carbohydrate diets – not only for weight loss, but for athletes. This goes against ‘traditional’ thoughts in sports nutrition, as to enter ketosis, an average person would have to eat less than 40g of carbohydrate per day.

There is some research to suggest that high carbohydrate diets (especially high GI) and grains can cause systemic inflammation which is a primary marker for many diseases and also has major implications for recovery and performance.

This is not something that I can claim to be an expert on. However, having given up sugar and replaced it with coconut milk as my main source of ‘additional’ calories, I have noticed a marked decrease in inflammation and bloating.

If you are interested in a ketogenic diet, then have a read of Rob Wolf’s and Mark Sisson’s blogs. There is research suggesting that when an athlete’s body does become ‘fat-adapted’, it can enhance endurance performance. See a [study here](#).

Benefits of the keto-diet (some proven, some not) include:
- Improved [blood lipid profiles](#)
- Lowered body fat
- Increased energy – ketones are touted as a superior fuel for focus and physical energy
- Stable blood sugar levels
- Reduced Inflammation and [neuroprotection](#) (protects brain cells and/or brain function in some manner)

Research in regards to ketogenic diets is very promising, although I’m not 100% convinced on the suitability of the diet for power athletes. At this point in time, I’m personally sticking with a diet with moderate amounts of carbohydrates, and healthy fats. No sugar, no grains. I’m also slowly introducing MCTs into my diet.

Remember that it can take a month’s to become ‘fat-adapted’ and during that adaptation phase, you can feel pretty lousy.
Making Weight

General tip – never trial something new the week before your fight. Be well prepared in all areas, this includes weigh cutting protocol

To ‘comfortably’ make weight for a fight, you need to get to be within 20lbs of your target weight, a week before.

After a weigh-in

If you’re 30lbs or more over your fight weight, 6 weeks before you’ll need to start dieting with 5 meals a day. High protein, moderate carb diet, with large amounts of fresh and organic vegetables and meats, large amounts of omega 3, and low amounts of sugar.

– You will need a diet that produces a calorie deficit.

– First start by working out your Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR)
Then use the Harris Benedict Formula, to work out your calorie requirements, based on your physical activity levels:  
– If you exercise 1-3 days a week, x your BMR by 1.375  
– 3-5 days a week BMR x 1.55  
– 6-7 days a week BMR x 1.725  
– if you have a physical job and train most days, BMR x 1.9

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If you want to lose 10lbs in 6 weeks, you’ll need to produce a calorie deficit over those 6 weeks of between 20,000 and 35,000 calories; depending on how fat you are. To lose 1lb of fat, in theory you’d need a deficit of 3,500 calories. So to lose 10lbs, you’re looking at 35,000. So you’ll require a calorie deficit of between 500 and 800 calories per day.

Here is a possible 3,000 + calorie diet plan.

**Basic Principles/Theory behind final weight cut**

1 gram of carbs, stores an additional 3 grams of water, so carbs need to be reduced  
– Sodium/salt makes the body retain water (so don’t have any)  
– Drinking lots of water, according to Martin Rooney, makes the body trigger hormones, which in turn, cause the body to excrete more water than normal. So by drinking 2 gallons, and tapering it down to no water at all, the body will lose more water weight.

**To lose around 15lbs in a week**

6 Days out from the weigh in:

Day 1: Increased water consumption effects the regulation of
aldosterone, a hormone which influences water retention and sodium: Drink 9 litres of water (some people recommend distilled water) Eat around 50-60g of carbs  Plenty of protein and fats, within 3 or 4 meals, no snacks  Plenty of organic veg, omega 3 etc. You’ll need nutrient dense food to stop you feeling too run down. This is the same for every day except the weigh in day. No Salt

Day 2:  Drink 4 litres of water  Eat around 50g of carbs  Plenty of protein and fats, within 3 or 4 meals, no snacks  No Salt

Day 3:  Drink 4 litres of water  Eat around 50g of carbs but no starches or sugar  Plenty of protein and fats, within 3 or 4 meals, no snacks  No Salt

Day 4:  Drink 2.5 litres of water  Eat around 50g of carbs but no starches or sugar  Plenty of protein and fats, within 3 or 4 meals, no snacks  No Salt

Day 5:  Drink 2.5 litres of water  Eat around 20-40g of carbs but no starches or sugar  Plenty of protein and fats, within 3 or 4 meals, no snacks  last meal by 6pm  No Salt  It is generally agreed that you should be about 3-6lbs over your weight-in weight, the time you go to bed before the night before the weigh-in.

Weigh in Day:  2 very small meals  less than 10g of carbs  No water or salt until weigh in

Weight Loss through Sweating – VERY dangerous and potentially damaging to performance

Be aware of physical effort and energy expenditure if making weight for a fight. You can do low intensity cardio wearing heavy or waterproof clothing the day of your weigh in. Weigh yourself at 5 minute intervals.

You can soak in a hot bath the night before the weigh in. Weigh yourself at 10 minute intervals. Put everything in the water, except for your mouth and nose. Towel off after each interval and weigh
yourself, do not shower, as this can make you gain more weight. Take 5-10 minute intervals between 10 minute bouts in the bath.

**Pooing out the Pounds**  Martin Rooney  “By taking the gentle, natural laxative before you go to bed the night before the weigh in, you should wake and clear your bowels completely. Remember that you would only do this if you felt you were not going to make the weight with the methods listed above."

**Diuretics**  If completely necessary, then use the day before the fight. Dandelion root 250mg-500mg 3 times a day. If required you can also consume caffeine to increase dehydration and to help with pooing out some more pounds also. Consume 200mg with meals also.

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**Rehydration After Weigh In**

– **Sip on 1L of distilled water as of 5 mins of weigh in**  Distilled or purified water is absorbed more efficiently than tap water. Add sodium and 40g of maltodextrin to every 500ml of water. Gastric emptying is imperative for rehydration, and of all carbohydrates, maltodextrin has the least detrimental effect on the rate of gastric emptying. Consume 1 litre of water, every hour.  
  – **Within an hour have a Cool Bath**  – soak in a cool bath for 15 minute intervals. Consider adding Himalayan salt and epsom salts to the bath in quantities large enough to replenish electrolytes. Consider adding glycerol to the bath too.

**Drink 2-3L of water with Glycerol, maltodextrin, whey protein, sodium & ALA**  – When the fighter is within 20% of his ‘fighting weight’ he can add glycerol to the water he/she is consuming. This is something that MUST be piloted months before a fight to make sure you can tolerate high amounts of glycerol. Consume around 50g of glycerol in 1 Litre of water. To pull even more water into the body and muscle cells, you can also consume 3-5g of creatine with every litre of water (don’t consume more than 10g in a day). Again,
consumption of creatine and tolerance to creatine needs to be understood well before the fight. Creatine should be consumed with caution, especially when dehydrated as it can be taxing on renal function. – To increase insulin secretion (and therefore glycogen loading) add 10g of protein for every 40g of maltodextrin. – Again to increase glycogen loading, consume 250g of Alpha Lipoic Acid before every litre.

– **Eat small meals every 30 minutes**, high in carbohydrates with a pinch of salt. – Keep an eye on the colour of your urine. If it’s clear, this should mean you’re rehydrated (as long as you’ve been sipping water and not downed 2 gallons in one go).

– It is possible to ‘hyperhydrate’ whereby the fighter puts on more water-weight than before the start of the weight-cut. This can actually improve strength and endurance but depends on the individual. Again, this something that needs to be trailed and tested. Hyperhydration would entail consuming more glycerol, creatine, alpha lipoic acid and maltodextrin. This needs to be done with caution; the glycerol can cause stomach cramps if the fighter is not used to large amounts.

**Day of Fight**

– Either way, consume distilled water, with sodium and maltodextrin, 1L per hour, until 3 hours before the fight.

What to consume the 3 hours before the fight is again tailored to the individual. I would normally recommend consuming the water, sodium and maltodextrin drink solution, but at lower amounts, up until 45 minutes before the fight. – Consume a high carbohydrate breakfast, with protein. E.g. oats/porridge, banana and ground almonds. – Eat another meal of similar macronutrient content, every 3 hours.

Personally I struggle to eat anything on the day of a fight, so normally blend a smoothie of hemp protein, oats and a banana. – Eat a meal with protein, medium/low GI carbs and water 3 hours before the fight. E.g. Sweet potato chips  Broccoli  Haddock or chicken breast  300ml water with 15g maltodextrin and a pinch of salt  – Eat a carbohydrate snack such as a banana 90 minutes before the fight.
Do not consume solid food after this point. – Continue to sip on a carbohydrate sports drink if required. Take any pre-fight supplements 30 minutes before the fight. **Avoid stimulants if it’s your first fight.** I would recommend taurine or beta alanine, but that’s another article...

**Tip – you should have at least 1 ‘trial run’ of a diet and final weight cut protocol, before you have to do it for a fight**

**Additional Thought about the 6 week weight cut**

After writing this part of the book, I’ve thought of a slightly more accurate way of using the Harris Benedict Formula to calculate calorie needs. You just need to accurately work out the calories you expire during a week’s training. I work out my calorie needs this way: According to [http://www.bmi-calculator.net/bmr-calculator/](http://www.bmi-calculator.net/bmr-calculator/) my BMR is about 2000 calories. Multiplied by 1.2 this gives 2400 calories just to maintain my weight if I DON’T train (according to the Harris Benedict Formula).

Multiplied by 7 that’s 16,800 per week I would require to maintain my weight during a sedentary lifestyle.

Next work out how many calories you expire during your training sessions. I do weights 3 times a week, and jiu jitsu once a week for about 2 hours. Weight training probably burns about 600 calories per session, jiu jitsu probably about 800 (only about 30 mins of the session is actual rolling). I’m not sure if there’s a really accurate way to calculate the calories, but it’s more specific than the “3-5 days a week” of the Harris Benedict formula.

The amount of calories you burn will depend on your exercise intensity, gender and bodyweight. So this is an extra 2600 calories I need per week. I have a sedentary job, so don’t need to take that into account.

If I add in my exercise calories to the 16800 I need for a sedentary lifestyle, that gives 19400 calories per week that I require to train
and maintain my bodyweight.

Divided by 7; that’s around 2800 calories per day I need

The best thing to do is monitor your weight and body fat very closely during a weight cut and adjust calories accordingly.

**Pro MMA Fighter’s Thoughts on Weight Cutting**

Just to emphasis the importance of trialing things yourself, and using what works for yourself, here’s my coach’s thoughts:

“I never do the distilled water thing. It makes me feel like complete **** lol. After weigh in I immediately have:

500 ml water
Pinch of pinch salt
1 tablespoon Honey
2 tablespoon of chia Seeds

Then next hour I consume 1 litre of water slowly with some fruit

Hour after that I have fats, usually Nuts and avocado

Then I have a carb meal...

Every individual is different though...
Another thing is if I weigh in on Friday I cut the salt out on Tuesday. Any earlier and it really effects how you feel and digest food up to the weigh in which I have found to make the weight cut harder...”
Training Day Nutrition

Any change in diet should be piloted during a training session as changes in food types etc. can cause stomach upset; which could obviously cause problems on the day of a fight.

Goals of Training Day Nutrition:
- Provide carbohydrate for energy during a fight
- Provide electrolytes to prevent cramps and fatigue
- Hyper-hydration

If a training session starts at **8pm** in the afternoon:

A fighter should eat a high carbohydrate, moderate protein meal in the morning. The meal should mainly contain low GI carbohydrates that provide a slow release of energy. Porridge with ground almonds and a banana would be ideal. For those people who are fine to eat gluten, whole-wheat bread with jam or even peanut butter would be a good choice also.

Research suggests that some sugary carbs are okay (but not ideal), as long as the main source of carbohydrate is low GI and therefore slower releasing. In order to maximise hydration, a drink of between 300 and 600ml of water can be consumed with every meal on fight day.
If training in a hot or humid environment, a fighter can super-hydrate by consuming fluid with meals, and an extra 200ml every 15 minutes; until 60 minutes before the fight. The fluid should contain electrolytes and should be 5-8% carbohydrate. Maltodextrin is the best form.

7-8am
Large bowl of porridge oats, with coconut milk, ground almonds and a banana
Separate drink - 300ml water with 20g maltodextrin and a pinch of Himalayan salt / or – a smoothie made with pure coconut milk and a small amount of berries and flax powder

9-10am
2 poached eggs on rye bread
300ml water with 20g maltodextrin and a pinch of Himalayan salt / or coconut water

12pm
Sweet potato chips
Broccoli
Haddock or chicken breast
300ml water with 15g maltodextrin and a pinch of pink salt / or coconut water

3pm
White fish
50g rice (white or wholegrain, depending on individual preference)
sweetcorn
300ml water with 15g maltodextrin and a pinch of pink salt / or coconut water

6pm
Whey protein in water
2 oatcakes
or
Hemp seeds, fruit, cashews – blended in water
Continue to sip on an isotonic drink up until 30 mins pre-training and some protein. Avoid high fat foods as these take longer to digest. Carbohydrate consumed within 4 hours of a session, may decrease lipolysis. The carbohydrate amount consumed should therefore be large enough to offset any negative effects caused by this reduction in fat oxidation.

Traditionally pasta or rice have been recommended as the pre-training meal. White rice is digested and assimilated very quickly, and being a high GI carbohydrate it will not provide a sustained release of carbohydrate. This is not a major problem, as the rice will still serve as a source of carbohydrate to top up the liver and muscle carbohydrate (glycogen) stores; which is the main objective. Ideally however, brown rice or a lower GI form of carbohydrate should be consumed.

**Ideally - avoid eating solid food 90 minutes before training (or a fight)**

Between 2 hours & 90 minutes before the fight or session is a great time to eat a banana. Some studies have proven that consuming foods with a high GI within an hour of a session can actually lower blood glucose, thus damaging performance levels. Consuming low GI foods an hour before training however, can affect blood flow to working muscles, as food is still being digested in the gut.

The only recommended carbohydrate to consume an hour before a fight/session, would be to sip on a sports drink. The sports drink should only contain maltodextrin as this has minimal effect on gastric emptying which in turn influences hydration. 2 hours before the fight/session, a fighter should sip on a carbohydrate and electrolyte drink. Ideally the carbohydrate should be maltodextrin to ensure gastric emptying is optimised.

**30 minutes before the fight /training**

Consume any pre-training supplements such as BCAAs and/or beta alanine.
During Training

Many fighters choose only to take a small sip of water. In theory a sports drink containing maltodextrin and electrolytes would be consumed in small amounts, but in practical terms, it is difficult to
tolerate much fluid intake in between rounds. If possible look to consume around 150ml of coconut water or a sports drink every 15 minutes.

**Post-Fight / Training Nutrition**

Rather ironically, chocolate milk has been proven in one study to enhance recovery from exercise more effectively than a commercial sports drink.

Immediately following training, a fighter should consume a drink containing high GI carbohydrate, some electrolytes, and some protein. For optimal recovery, creatine and alpha lipoic acid can be taken with the drink. Insulin levels are highest immediately after the session, and remain elevated for approximately 2 hours.

Chocolate milk contains protein, some sodium and some high GI carbohydrates and therefore is a good option for a ‘recovery drink’. Ideally however, a whey protein, maltodextrin and electrolyte drink should be consumed.

The drink could contain:
- 25-30g whey protein
- 50-100g maltodextrin
- 2 pinches of salt (ideally Himalayan salt, or use coconut water)
- 5-10g creatine
- 1000mg alpha lipoic acid (antioxidant that enhances creatine uptake)
Optional: consider adding an anti-inflammatory food source such as turmeric or ginger to enhance recovery.

Consume drink then eat a banana.

For optimum health, and recovery, an athlete may wish to consume a smoothie or shake made from whole foods, like blended fruit and
quinoa for protein. Interestingly, high carbohydrate intake will spike insulin levels – which may help in terms of ‘glycogen-recovery’ but may actually decrease testosterone and growth hormone release.

I would therefore recommend a high intake of carbohydrate post fight or post training, if physical exercise is planned again the next day, otherwise opt for a moderate carbohydrate meal or drink, of 30-40g of carbohydrates.

Consume the drink within 30 minutes of the end of a fight or training session. Eat a high carbohydrate meal within 2 hours of the fight ending. Ideally within 1 hour, as insulin levels will be higher, meaning that more carbohydrate will be utilised to replenish muscle glycogen.

If you are training or competing the next day - Ideally, 1-1.2 g per kg Body Mass of carbohydrate should be consumed every hour for first 4 hrs in order to optimise glycogen refueling. If physical exercise is not planned for the following day, then this amount of carbohydrate would not be necessary.

Do NOT drink alcohol after a sparring session or a fight. Turmeric, consumed with black pepper, should ideally be part of a meal or even a drink, consumed with an hour of a fight or any striking-session. The spice turmeric has been shown to minimise, in mice at least, damage caused to the brain by pressure or impact. Alcohol does the opposite.
General Recovery and Injury Prevention Tips

It is highly recommended that any change in routine is piloted in training, before a competitive fight, as individual preferences and tolerances impact the effectiveness of each strategy.

**Extensive warm up**
In cold environments, muscle temperature should be increased as much as practically possible. **This reduces the chance of injury and increases maximum power-output.**

The increased power output of course, consumes more calories (as more physical work is done). The extent of the warm up may need to be tailored to offset any risk of dehydration and fatigue; in warm and human environments for example.

Sip on a carbohydrate/electrolyte drink during the warm up to offset any dehydration.

Dynamic stretching is recommended as part of a warm up as opposed to static stretching - the warm up should built up in intensity and replicate as closely as possible, the actual movements and actions of the game to come.

**Cool down** Light dynamic stretching, 20 min cycle/low impact low intensity exercise. Foam roller. **Will enhance recovery.** Consume foods with anti-inflammatory properties within 5 hours of a fight; including turmeric, ginger, pineapple and/or oily fish.
Easy Recipes

Ideally we would all be living in caves, drinking milk from our goat and foraging for berries, then cooking meals from scratch. In practical terms however, when faced with the goal of eating 3,500 calories a day, one typically, will need to fall back on a few ‘lazy’ tactics to get enough consumed per day.

Eat fresh, organic foods whenever possible, and cook from scratch whenever possible. If it’s not possible, try blending stuff. I personally don’t eat or recommend dairy; so where milk is used I would substitute with coconut milk or coconut oil instead of butter:

**Pouting Fish Fingers, sweet potato Chips with Basil Mayo**

**Ingredients**
2 x 130 g pouting or whiting fillets
sea salt
freshly ground black pepper
2 heaped tablespoons plain flour
1 free-range egg, beaten
50 g fresh breadcrumbs
1 clove garlic, crushed
2 sprigs fresh rosemary
½ lemon, cut into wedges
For the sweet potato chips
2 medium sweet potatoes, scrubbed clean and cut lengthways into 8 wedges
½ teaspoon sweet smoked paprika
olive oil
For the basil mayo
4 sprigs fresh basil
1 heaped tablespoon low-fat mayonnaise, made with free-range eggs
juice of ½ lemon
1 tablespoon fat-free natural yoghurt

**Instructions**
Preheat the oven to 200ºC/400ºF/gas 6. Toss the sweet potato wedges in a roasting tray with a pinch of salt and pepper, the paprika and a lug of olive oil. Cook in the hot oven for 35 to 40 minutes, or until golden and cooked through. Meanwhile, put the pouting fillets on a board and sprinkle over a pinch of salt and pepper and the flour, making sure they're well
coated on both sides. Dunk the floured fillets in the beaten egg then transfer them to the breadcrumbs and push and turn them until well coated on all sides.

Put a large frying pan on a medium heat. Add a good lug of olive oil along with the garlic and rosemary to flavour the oil. When the garlic starts to sizzle, it’s time to add the fish. Shake the fillets so any excess breadcrumbs fall off then add to the pan, skin-side down. If you're cooking fish fingers, they’ll need 5 to 6 minutes; a whole fillet will take 7 to 8 minutes. Don’t be tempted to touch the fish, use your instincts and let it cook until golden on the underside before flipping it over and reducing to a low heat while it finishes cooking.

Meanwhile, chop off the tough ends of the basil stalks then pound the rest of it with a pinch of salt in a pestle and mortar until you’ve got a paste. Add the mayonnaise, yoghurt and lemon juice and muddle it all together.

Serve the pouting with a portion of sweet potato chips, a good dollop of basil mayo and a wedge of lemon for squeezing over. Delicious with a crisp green salad or hot buttered peas.

Source

Lazy Alternative
Defrost some frozen fish of your choice (preferably wild, dolphin friendly fish (farmed fish is full of carcinogens and synthetic chemicals)
Preheat oven to 200ºC
Slice sweet potato into wedges, cover in black pepper, Himalayan salt and olive oil
Cook for 35 to 40 minutes

Fry fish in frying pan with olive oil or coconut oil or poach salmon in a pan full of hot water and butter for 15-20 minutes

Serve fish with sweet potato chips and a large handful of spinach
Blueberry Buckwheat Pancakes

Ingredients
90g buckwheat flour
105g wholemeal pastry flour
1 1/2 tsp baking powder
1/2 tsp bicarbonate of soda
1/4 tsp salt
240ml buttermilk
180ml nonfat milk
20g honey
2 large eggs
2 tbsp canola oil
300g blueberries, divided
160g real maple syrup

Instructions
In a large bowl whisk together the flours, baking powder, bicarbonate of soda and salt. In another bowl, beat together the buttermilk, non-fat milk, honey, eggs, and oil. Stir the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients, mixing only enough to combine them. Stir in 150g of berries.

Preheat a large nonstick flat-top or frying pan over a medium flame.

Ladle the batter into the pan with a 60ml measure. Flip the pancake when it is golden brown on the bottom and bubbles are forming on top, about 1 1/2 mins. Cook the other side until golden brown, about 1 1/2 mins.

Serve topped with more blueberries and the maple syrup.

Source
**Super-Lazy Smoothie**

**Ingredients**
- 40g hemp seeds or whey protein (unflavoured ideally)
- 1 banana
- 30g porridge oats
- 5ml hemp oil/olive oil
- 1 pinch of Himalayan salt
- 30g maltodextrin (add only if require high carbohydrate intake that day; this is a very high GI carb that will increase muscle glycogen stores but also cause a dip in blood sugar)
- 10g Flax-seed powder
- 50-100ml of coconut milk
- 200-300ml water

**Instructions**
Blend all the ingredients for 30-60 seconds
Super Lazy High Protein Porridge

**Ingredients**
20-30g ground almonds
50-100g of porridge oats
1 banana
Handful of raisons
100-200ml of coconut milk
Optional – 20g whey protein

**Instructions**
Mix all ingredients except banana in a bowl and place in microwave for 2 minutes / mix in a pan on the hob for 2/3 minutes.
Serve with sliced banana

Super-Lazy Pasta

**Ingredients**
Ideally you would make your own pasta sauce using fresh tomatoes, onions, garlic, black pepper and vinegar. Freeze the sauce and reuse with each pasta meal.
Alternatively (and less healthily) use a commercial sauce
100g of pasta
Tin of tuna or salmon

**Instructions**
Bring a pan of water to the boil
Add pasta
Stir pasta and leave to simmer in the water for 5-10 minutes. Drain pasta in a sieve and then place back in the pan. Mix in commercial or home-made tomato sauce and then the tin of tuna or salmon. Serve with a handful of spinach.

**Basic Stir Fry**

![Basic Stir Fry Image](image)

**Ingredients**
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp sesame oil
- Thumb-sized piece of fresh root ginger, peeled and grated
- Pack stir-fry vegetables
- Pack straight-to-wok noodles
- Meat: beef/chicken etc, roughly cubed

**Instructions**
- Put the noodles in a bowl and pour boiling water over them. Stir gently to separate, then drain thoroughly.
- Put oil in pan, stir-fry meat until cooked. Set aside.
- Stir fry ginger and harder pieces of veg for 2 mins.
- Add noodles and rest of veg, stir fry over high heat until just cooked.
- Add back meat with soy and sesame oil. Cook couple minutes, serve.

**Source**
**Christmas Couscous**

100g green or brown lentils
100g wholegrain couscous
100g vegetable stock (in the example I used hot water with vegan vegetable bouillon)
1 carrot, grated
15g pistachio nuts (shelled)
15g dried cranberries
Juice from half an orange or 1 satsuma
1 tbsp olive oil
Spices – ginger, cinnamon, cumin, coriander to taste.

*Skip cooking lentils if you are using tinned ones.

Turn the hob onto a medium heat.
Add lentils to a pan with just enough water to cover them. Bring to a rapid simmer so that you only see a few bubbles. Add more water if needed and cook for 20 minutes. Drain lentils and put to one side.
Take a bowl and mix together couscous, cranberries and spices. Pour over hot vegetable stock and leave for 5 minutes to allow the couscous to absorb it.
Grate the carrot into a bowl.
Juice the orange into a cup and chop the parsley.
Fluff up the couscous with a fork and after the 5 minutes is up, add the juice, carrot, parsley and nuts. Serve on top of some green salad leaves, such as cavolo nero kale, and drizzle with lemon juice.

**Source** - Wholeheartedlyhealthy.com
Healthy Shopping List

**Fruit & Veg – Organic if possible**
- Bananas
- Tomatoes
- Broccoli
- Spinach
- Red grapes
- Pineapple
- Lettuce
- Peppers
- Grains/Carbohydrates
  - Oats
  - Buckwheat
  - Couscous
  - Quinoa
  - Sweet potato
- Nuts
  - Peanut butter
  - Almonds
  - Mixed nuts and seeds
- Oils
  - Olive oil
  - Hemp oil
- Meat & Fish
  - Wild Salmon
  - Organic Chicken
- Spices
  - Tumeric
  - Ginger
- Other
  - Fish oil
  - Wheatgrass
  - Himalayan salt
  - Flax seed powder
- Carrots
- Kale
- Mushrooms
- Sprouts
- Tomatoes
- Watercress
- Onions
- Garlic
- Berries
- Pasta*
- Wholegrain bread*
- Noodles*
- *Contain gluten
- Potatoes
- Ground almonds
- Mixed nut bars
- Coconut oil
- Grass fed Beef
- Raw honey (not a mix of filtered honey)
Supplements

I would recommend if buying from in the UK – a website such as bulkpowders.com or the proteinworks.com and if possible, buying unflavoured versions of supplements.

Protein Powder such as - Hemp Protein, egg protein, whey protein

Creatine – Creapure creatine

Alpha Lipoic Acid – To take with creatine

Maltodextrin Powder – To make own sports drinks

Optional:
Beta alanine
Caffeine
Acetyl L Carnitine
Greens powders
Caffeine tablets

Final Thoughts

For increased energy levels, health and vitality – consume as many organic foods in their original form as possible and minimise grains and cut out sugar.

I have recommended maltodextrin drinks in this book as research suggests it is ideal for rehydration when combined with electrolytes. However those looking to improve health and reduce inflammation, or to enter ketosis, could switch to coconut water instead.
References

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- Caffeine enhances cognitive function and skill performance during simulated soccer activity.
- Sport-specific nutrition: Practical strategies for team sports
- Monster Supplements Kickstart 2015 ebook
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About the Author

I have 1st Class Degree in Sport Science from Loughborough University; an MSc in Exercise & Nutrition from the University of Liverpool (studied in Chester, awarded by Liverpool) and quite randomly, a Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM/CAM) Diploma in Digital Marketing from the Oxford College of Marketing.

I used to be personal trainer, I’ve had 8 amateur MMA fights and 1 full contact kickboxing fight.

I write for the GoodMenProject, Business2Community, CureJoy.com, CareerFuel.net and have contributed to several martial arts publications

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