Fat Girl PhD
Meal Plan

So... Let's get started!
About Fat Girl PhD

Hello! My name’s Katie Lowe, and I write Fat Girl, PhD – a blog about healthy living, wellbeing and happiness.

Fat Girl, PhD started in April 2012, but my journey started a long time before that. You see, I’ve always been the fat girl. Always. It’s just how I roll. But when I had an accident in 2007, I couldn’t walk for a number of years, and the weight piled on. Combined with an unhappy relationship and even unhappier breakup, I found myself at 290lbs in August 2010.

Over the last two years, I’ve lost over 130lbs through a programme of diet and exercise designed by health and wellbeing badass Matt Peacock, owner of Ascenté Health for Life. Which is pretty exciting, I think you’ll agree.

But the thing is – it’s not just about weight loss. If it’d been all about weight loss, I don’t think I’d have seen anywhere near this sort of success. No – this is about wellbeing, and happiness. Two things that are far, far more important than any number, on any scale.

Now, admittedly, my blog started off as a way to make myself accountable – because if my friends were reading about my weight loss, I could hardly sit in the office and work my way through a round of sausage sandwiches and cake. But since August 2012, it’s been linked to from major American websites including the Huffington Post and MindBodyGreen, and my weight loss story has appeared in the UK press in the MailOnline, The Sun Online, and both the online and print editions of The Daily Star.

Since then, I’ve been completely inspired by the messages I’ve had from people all over the globe, who’ve lost weight and found happiness because they’ve read the blog. Nothing makes me happier – or blows my mind more!

So, this meal plan is a response to the big question - what, exactly, does a person eat when they’re trying to lose 130lbs? This really is a week in the life - and I’m hopeful that if you’re looking to improve your life, and make changes that will last, then you’ll find this meal plan, in conjunction with the exercise programme that you’ll also find on my blog, a great way to get healthy and change your life.

Also on the blog are most of the recipes that this meal plan outlines - so visit www.fatgirlphd.com to find out more.

It’s not a quick fix, by any means - this programme takes time. But as you can see from this picture (to the right), it definitely works. That’s just ten months of progress - progress that’s still going on as we speak.

And that’s what I’d like to stress about this meal plan. There’s still room to improve, to bring in new recipes and new ideas - and I’d like your help with those.

You see, the main thing I’ve learned from this is that it’s hard to make recipes using unprocessed, natural foods that are really unhealthy - because it turns out that, generally, you can’t go too far wrong when you’re eating real food.

So this meal plan is just a start. Hopefully it’ll give you the framework to make real changes, and come up with recipes of your own - and help you to get on the path to real health and wellbeing.

And with that in mind...

Let’s get started!
How Does It Work?

This meal plan is designed to be used alongside the exercise programme that you can download from the blog. The idea is that if you’re following the programme three or four times a week, this meal plan should help you to lose fat and build muscle – without feeling hungry or deprived.

It’s essential, though, to bear a few things in mind.

Firstly, as I’ve said time and time again – we’re not dieting here. If you’re expecting to lose 10lbs a week – like you might on, say, a low-carb diet, or some other crazy-ass fad – then you’ll be very disappointed indeed. It’s just not possible to lose that amount of weight and keep it off, unless you’re okay with the idea of still eating cabbage soup (or whatever your method is) twenty years from now.

Instead, we’re working on a lifestyle change.

You’ll notice that most of the food here is relatively unprocessed, and there’s a lot of cooking to be done. That’s not to say that there aren’t bits here and there that are processed – the sauces, for instance, are often shop-bought, but if you’re a hardcore ‘clean eater’ then you’ll probably want to substitute these for ones you’ve made yourself, or just leave them out completely.

However, we’re following the 80/20 rule here – so a good 80% of the food you’ll be eating is fresh and natural. But that’s not to say it isn’t delicious. We’ve got burgers, we’ve got a roast dinner, we’ve even got Chinese food – but the difference is in the way you cook them.

Not only that, in fact – but the fact that you are cooking, rather than buying it ready-made, will help you to burn calories by increasing our old friend NEAT (non-exercise activity thermogenesis). Increase that, and your body will be more efficient at burning calories all day long – meaning that we’re on to a winner on the weight loss front.

The thing is – and I swear to God this is true – the more you cook your own food, the more you’ll realise just what it is that you like to eat. For instance, a lot of processed food is either really sweet, or really salty… And that’s about it. After a little while, you’ll come to find yourself able to identify different herbs, spices and tastes that you like – and soon enough, you’ll be coming up with recipes of your own.

Recipes which, incidentally, I would love you to send me. Go on. Feel free.

This whole programme is about putting you back in control of your eating. It’s about understanding what you like, what you don’t, and, frankly, what’s got you here in the first place. We’ve all got different reasons for wanting to lose weight – but if you don’t know why you’ve gained it, you’ll find it considerably more difficult to lose.

That’s why each day, alongside the food I’m suggesting you chow down on, you’ll find something to think about. Something that should hopefully help you to identify why your relationship with food is what it is – as well as giving you something to contemplate during that long cardio workout you’ll be doing!

I can’t stress this enough – we’re looking at a long-term change here, because this whole programme is founded on the idea of a holistic approach to your health. Exercise is one part, and food is another – but it’s important to give yourself the opportunity to look at your whole life in every aspect, so that you can take control of it.
You won’t lose weight quickly on this plan – in fact, some weeks you might not seem to have lost weight at all – but combined with the exercise programme, you’ll find that your body shape changes first. Have faith in that, and the scales will follow – and you’ll find yourself eating well, and working out in a way that fits in with your lifestyle forever, rather than just for a couple of weeks.

So… How does it work?

Let’s look at how traditional methods of weight loss function. Usually, you’d take your daily energy expenditure (your metabolic rate) and take 500 calories per day off of that. That works in theory, because if you’re 500kcal a day down, that’s equivalent to 3500kcal a week. Which is equal to a 1lb weight loss.

Makes sense, right?

Mmmm… Kind of.

The trouble with this method is that as you approach your target weight, you’ll find yourself suddenly unable to shift those pounds. That’s because your body’s pretty smart – so it adapts to losing that 500kcal a day, gets itself into starvation mode, and lowers your metabolic rate.

Meaning not only are you kinda hungry, but also – you’re not losing any weight.

What this programme suggests, instead, is that we take your target weight into account as a starting point. I, for instance, would like to be 10st 7lbs (147lbs, or 66.8kg) because that’s a healthy weight for my height, according to my BMI.

We then work out what your BMR (basal metabolic rate) would be if you were already at that weight. Your BMR is how many calories you need to consume for your body to function, assuming you don’t actually bother getting out of bed – and you can work yours out here. In my case, that’s 1469kcal.

Then, to account for the fact that I do get out of bed (most days, anyway) we have to apply something called the Harris-Benedict principle. That’s a formula that works like this:

- If you’re sedentary (you get little or no exercise) multiply your BMR by 1.2.
- If you’re lightly active (light exercise/sports 1-3 days/week) multiply it by 1.375.
- If you’re moderately active (moderate exercise/sports 3-5 days/week) it’s multiplied by 1.55.
- If you are very active (hard exercise/sports 6-7 days a week) multiply your BMR by 1.725.
- And if you are extra active (very hard exercise/sports & physical job or 2x training) multiply it by 1.9.

Now, it’s not unusual to overestimate your activity levels – but most people are somewhere between sedentary and lightly active these days, what with desk jobs, commutes and the like, and it’s a much safer bet to assume lower, rather than higher in this case.

The result of this equation tells you the amount of calories you need to maintain your goal weight. It’s your daily energy requirement, and what you need to consume to avoid the body going into sleep mode, or gaining weight - so you have to make sure that what you’re eating over the course of a day meets that number.

Your body will adapt to that being the number of calories it expects you to eat on any given day – and so, in the knowledge that that’s how many calories it’ll be getting, it’ll work to getting you to that weight, so that you can use those calories most efficiently. That means that when you reach your target weight – which you will, in time – you won’t have to readjust your diet to compensate for the calorie deficit you’d have if you were on a low-calorie programme. Boom.

So - assuming you’re doing this meal plan in conjunction with the exercise programme, we’re shooting for a level of activity that the Harris-Benedict formula would call “lightly active” – meaning you take your BMR, and multiply that by 1.375. So, using me as an example, this happens:

\[1469 \times 1.375 = 2019 \text{ calories per day}\]
So for my target weight, which is a healthy BMI for my height, I need to be consuming just over 2000kcal a day – which just so happens to be bang on the nose of the UK government guidelines for a woman’s daily calorie intake.

Coincidence? I think not.

Let’s use another example. Say you’re a man, who’s 5’10” tall, aiming for a body weight of 11st 7lbs (161lbs, or 73.1kg). Using the BMR calculator, you’ve got a BMR of 1788kcal if you stay in bed.

So again, we do the equation:

\[
1788 \times 1.375 = 2458 \text{ calories per day}
\]

Again, it really isn’t a coincidence that this is in line with the government guidelines for you blokes – namely, that you should be aiming for 2500kcal each day. But that does mean that you’ll need to eat about 500kcal more than this meal plan suggests.

This is where it’s important to understand the importance of good nutrition, and making the right choices. If you add 500kcal in crisps and sweets, you’re not giving your body the good things it needs to be really well nourished. Instead, you should shoot for extra bits of lean meat, potatoes, and veggies. If in doubt, I’d recommend just increasing the portion sizes a little in your main meals – because this whole meal plan has been designed to be well balanced, as well as tasty.

You can probably see from reading this that there’s nothing groundbreaking in here, really. That eating in line with your RDA (Recommended Daily Allowance) and getting more exercise will lead to a healthy lifestyle just ain’t that surprising. But what’s important is letting your body adapt to that healthy BMI you’re aiming for, while eating really good, nutritious food. By following this plan, you’ll be eating the right amount of macro-nutrients (carbs, fats and proteins), re-educating yourself about real food, and changing your tastes so that eventually, it won’t seem like you’re on a diet at all.

These sorts of changes are ones you can make today, and keep up for the rest of your life. Combined with the exercise programme, eating like this has helped me to lose almost half of my body weight – whilst losing fat, and gaining muscle, and, frankly, whilst living.

If you can adapt to this lifestyle change, it doesn’t matter if you cheat from time to time, or if you eat out occasionally, or have a few too many beers at the weekend every so often. That’s fine. You haven’t fallen off the wagon, or ruined your diet, or any of those old terms for failure that the diet industry promotes.

You’re just living. And at the end of the day, that’s what it’s all about.

So – let’s eat!
Drinkin’ & Sleepin’

Regular followers of my Twitter account will know that I just love coffee.

Love it.

I just cannot seem to function before I’ve had my morning cup o’Joe - because another thing I really love is sleep.

Mmmm... Sleep.

Drinking and sleeping deserve a page of their own in this plan, because they’re things you should be thinking about at all times while you’re changing your diet.

You should be drinking as much water as possible - not least because being adequately hydrated will help your body to burn fat, and to escape the pangs we sometimes mistake for hunger, but which are actually just thirst.

It takes a little while to get into the habit of drinking more water - I know at first, I was complaining that I was full all the time, feeling like my tum was a ‘jiggin’ with a severe case of water belly. But these days, I’m never without a big glass of water - and my God do I make a lot of trips to the office water cooler.

Aim for about six glasses a day (of any size), or one every time you eat. And if you’re struggling to keep track, fill a few bottles with tap water instead. That'll help you to keep an eye on how much you’ve got through.

Then, there’s tea and coffee. You can have as many of these as you like, excluding things like lattes (which are more milk than coffee) - but try to just use a dash of milk, rather than a big glug each time. Personally, I’ll have a couple of cups of coffee in the morning, and a couple of mugs of green tea in the afternoon - because apparently, it’s a great way to get your metabolism going (as well as being tasty, if you pick a fruity variety!)

So staying adequately hydrated is important. Don’t forget it.

It’s also important to make sure you’re getting enough sleep. That might seem odd, given I’m also suggesting you get moving more, to keep calories burning - but it’s essential if you’re making a ‘whole life’ change.

A good night’s sleep can make a world of difference to your ability to stay on track - because when you’re well rested, you’re more likely to feel in control of your choices.

I can’t be alone in having eaten a big ol’ fatty breakfast on a morning when I’ve had too little sleep, or having turned to sugar as fuel when I’m feeling exhausted. But these things just lead to a bigger crash later - meaning you’re even more tired once the “buzz” has worn off. That sucks.

But if you’re doing this plan with the exercise programme, you’ll probably find you’re a little more tired anyway - because you’re walking, cycling, or cross-training for at least an hour, three or four times a week. That seems easy when you’re doing it - but I know for a fact that I sleep a heck of a lot better on a workout day.

Above everything else, making time to get enough sleep - however much that is for you - means that you’re being mindful of everything your body needs, and giving yourself the care and attention that will help you to achieve a real sense of wellbeing.

And that’s a heck of a lot better than just being on a diet.
Day One

**Breakfast**

30g Cornflakes
125ml Semi-Skimmed Milk
Banana
Medium Boiled Egg

**Lunch - Chicken Salad:**

Small Whole Wheat Bread Roll
50g Spinach
Grilled Chicken Breast
6 Cherry Tomatoes
30g Cucumber
1.25” Cube of Low-Fat Feta Cheese

Dressing, made from:

1tsp Balsamic Vinegar
1tsp Dijon Mustard

**Dinner - Spaghetti Bolognese:**

125g Extra Lean Mince
50g Onions
1tsp Olive Oil
75g Peppers
50g Celery
1 Clove of Garlic
10g Chillies
1 Knorr Beef Stock Cube
30g Mushrooms - chopped in half
30g Fresh Spinach
80g Chopped Tomatoes
30g Tomato Purée
1tsp Worcester Sauce
1tsp Balsamic Vinegar
Mixed Herbs
75g Spaghetti per person
15g Reduced Fat Cheddar
Black Pepper to taste

**Mid-morning:**

40g Ham (around 3 slices)
Small Whole Wheat Bread Roll
Apple

**Afternoon:**

170g Pot 0% Fat Greek Yogurt
15g Cashew Nuts
1tsp Honey

**Plus...**

One slice of Whole Wheat Toast
1tsp Almond Butter
1tsp Apricot Jam

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Let’s be nice!

If you’re going to make a lifestyle change - which you are, starting from today - then it’s worth taking a moment to think about where you’re starting from in a positive way.

Stand in front of the mirror, and take some time to really look at yourself. You might not be happy with your body, but it’s the only one you’ve got - and it’s going to be changing a lot over the next few months. Try to focus on three things that are good about your body - and remind yourself of them all day!
Day Two

**Breakfast**

30g Cornflakes  
125ml Semi-Skimmed Milk  
Banana

**Lunch - Cream Cheese Salmon Pita:**

1 Medium Whole Wheat Pita Bread  
120g Baked/Grilled Salmon Fillet  
1 tbsp Low-Fat Cream Cheese  
50g Spinach

**Dinner - Jacket Potato & Spicy Chicken:**

Large Baked Potato  
1 Grilled Chicken Breast  
1 tsp Cumin  
1 tsp Fresh Parsley  
10g Fresh Chillies  
Juice from half a lime  
1 Green Pepper  
Red Onion  
2 Stalks Celery  
1/2 Can Kidney Beans  
80g Chopped Tomatoes  
15g Low-Fat Cheddar Cheese

**Mid-morning:**

40g Ham (around 3 slices)  
Small Whole Wheat Bread Roll

**Afternoon:**

170g Pot 0% Fat Greek Yogurt  
15g Cashew Nuts  
1 tsp Honey

**Plus...**

Apple  
Boiled Egg

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How did you get here?

This isn’t a question that you’ll be able to answer in a day - so don’t let it intimidate you. It’s a biggie. But one of the first steps in making a long-term change to your eating habits is to begin to understand why you’ve cultivated negative ones in the first place.

For me, I’m a stress eater. I take on too much work, and then I panic... And so I eat. I’m also a hormonal eater, an anger eater, and just an all-round emotional eater.

But knowing that means I’m able to identify those times when I’m getting stressed, or angry, or just hormonal, and prepare for them. Even if that means indulging. Understanding the cause puts you in control of it - and that’s half the battle.

So today, think about the times when you’ve had an unhealthy relationship with food. Think about those times when you’ve beaten yourself up for overeating - or for anything else, in fact - identify them for what they are, and let them go. You’re moving forwards now - but to get to where you’re going, you need to understand how you got to where you are.
Day Three

**Breakfast**

30g Porridge Oats  
125ml Semi-Skimmed Milk  
Dash of Cinnamon  
Dash of Ginger  
Dash of Nutmeg  
1 tsp Honey  
1 Medium Apple

**Lunch - Chicken & Sweet Potato Salad:**

1 Grilled Chicken Breast Fillet  
50g Spinach  
1 Fresh Red Bell Pepper  
1 Sweet Potato, Baked in Honey, Chilli Flakes & Lime Juice  
1.25” Cube of Low-fat Feta Cheese  
30g Cucumber

**Dinner - Beef Stroganoff:**

1 Medium Onion  
1 tsp Olive Oil  
1.5 Cloves of Garlic  
1 Small Green Chilli  
1 Stalk of Celery  
150g Steak, Trimmed of Fat & Cut into Strips  
50g Mushrooms  
200ml Gravy, fairly thick  
2 tbsp Horseradish Sauce  
75g White Rice (dry weight)

**Mid-morning:**

Small Whole Wheat Bread Roll  
40g Ham (around 3 slices)

**Plus...**

1 Tangerine/Satsuma  
1 Banana

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**Today, I quit snarking.**

Yep. That’s right. You’ve done three days of all-round awesome eating, and you’re hopefully feeling a little better already - about yourself, about your eating habits, and just in terms of yummy tummy goodness... Or something like that.

Now it’s time to turn that outwards. Today’s the day where you decide to step out of the snark culture, and concentrate on making other people happy. We live in a world of body image beat-down, and it sucks - because when you’re happy, it’s a heck of a lot easier not to over-eat your way out of self-loathing.

Thing is, getting yourself out of poor body image will take some time - and that’s something we’ll build on as we go - but it’s a lot easier if you help other people along the way. So give someone a compliment. Find something to like about everyone you meet. And call time on body snarking. For good.
Day Four

**Breakfast**

30g Cornflakes
125ml Semi-Skimmed Milk
Boiled egg

**Lunch - Salmon & Feta Salad:**

50g Iceberg Lettuce
1 Baked/Grilled Salmon Fillet, drizzled in Lemon, Honey and Black Pepper
1.25” Cube of Low-fat Feta Cheese
30g Cucumber
6 Cherry Tomatoes
1 tsp Dijon Mustard

**Dinner - Staying-In Chinese Take-Out:**

0.5tbsp Dark Soy Sauce (check if gluten-free)
50g White Cabbage, Shredded
100g Grated Carrot
100g Onions
12.5g Fresh Chillies
50g Mushrooms
150g Peppers
50g Beansprouts
1.5tbsp Extra Virgin Olive Oil
2 Cloves of Garlic
1 Chicken Breast
25g Self-Raising Flour (or GF replacement)
37.5ml Whole Milk
60ml Water
0.1pt Cooking Oil
50g White Rice (dry weight)
12.5g Lettuce
2tbsp Sweet Chilli Sauce

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*Find something inspiring.*

We've all got different things in life that motivate or inspire us - and these things will change at different times in your life.

They don't necessarily have to be weight related - in fact, it's better if they're not.

Think instead about what you're doing this for. Your health, for one - and those people who will be glad to know you're living a longer, healthier, more satisfying life.

And think about those people who aren't in a situation to do what you're doing - say, those people with health issues that are a real barrier to improving themselves.

Finally, think about people who have done what you want to do - whether that's in their careers, families, or whatever else you're motivated by. There's absolutely no reason you can't do that too - so keep that at the forefront of your mind today!
Day Five

Breakfast

30g Cornflakes
125ml Semi-Skimmed Milk
Medium Banana

Lunch - Ham Sarnie:

2 Slices Whole Wheat Bread
40g Ham (about 3 slices)
40g Lettuce
30g Tomato
1 tsp Low-Fat Mayo

Dinner - Bun-free Beef Burger & Roasted Vegetables:

1 Medium Beef Burger
50g Iceberg Lettuce
30g Cucumber
Medium Tomato
30g Mushrooms
1 Clove of Garlic
30g Courgette
1/2 Red Onion
15g Red Chili Peppers
1 Bell Pepper
Fresh Basil
1 Medium Sweet Potato
1 tsp Paprika (optional)
1 tbsp Balsamic Vinegar
1 tbsp Dijon Mustard
30g Low-Fat Cheddar Cheese
1 tbsp Low-Fat Mayo

Mid-morning:

170g Pot 0% Fat Greek Yogurt
15g Cashew Nuts
1 tsp Honey

Plus...

33g Dark Chocolate
1 Tangerine
1 Apple
1 pint of Beer or Cider

Who are you when you’re not fat?

I define myself as a “fat girl” - as you’ve probably gathered from the title of this blog. But I’m not just a fat girl. Nor have I ever been just a fat girl.

Have a think today about what makes you ‘you.’ Get out of the mindset that your weight, size, or shape defines you, and instead think about why you’re awesome.

You might have a hidden talent; you might be the sort of person that’s good to have around in a crisis; you might be a Mum, or a friend, a brother or sister. Either way - that’s what should define you. Remember it.
Day Six

**Breakfast**

120g Baked Salmon Fillet, marinaded in Lemon, Honey and Black Pepper
1 Poached Egg
1 Whole Wheat Bread Roll
1 tbsp Low-Fat Cream Cheese
50g Baby Spinach

**Lunch - Chicken Salad:**

50g Fresh Lettuce
1 Sweet Red Pepper
6 Cherry Tomatoes
30g Cucumber
1 Grilled Chicken Breast
1 tbsp Balsamic Vinegar
1 tbsp Dijon Mustard

**Mid-morning:**

Banana

**Plus...**

Low-fat Peach Yogurt
Two 17ml glasses of Red Wine

**Dinner - Gluten-Free Cauliflower Base Hawaiian Pizza:**

100g Cauliflower, Grated
1 Medium Egg
113g Low-Fat Mozzarella
1 tsp Fresh Parsley
1 tsp Fresh Basil
1 tsp Fresh Oregano
2 tbsp Tomato Puree
100g Low-Fat Cheddar Cheese, Grated
40g Ham
2 tbsp Pineapple Chunks

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**Have a little me time.**

This whole process should be about improving your life - but quite often, when you’re trying to do that, you can find yourself buzzing around from one thing to the next without ever really stopping to think.

Today, put five minutes aside (or more, if you can spare them) and do nothing. Absolutely nothing. Just take a seat, get yourself comfortable, and spend some time with you - no TV, no distractions, nothing. Just you.

Be present in yourself, and be mindful of what’s going on in your life at the moment. You’re making big changes, and being 100% aware of your own mind and body will help you to stay focused, and enjoy the process as a great thing. So stop!
Day Seven

Breakfast

2 Slices of Back Bacon, Grilled
1 Poached Egg
1 tsp Unsalted Butter
2 Slices of Whole Wheat Bread
1 tsp Ketchup

Mid-morning:

Apple

Lunch - Roast Dinner:

200g Lean Lamb, Roasted
1 tsp Olive Oil
1 tsp Fresh Rosemary
2 Garlic Cloves
5 Fresh Peppermint Leaves
1tsp Cumin
2tbsp Balsamic Vinegar
300g Potatoes
6 Asparagus Spears
3 Fresh Broccoli Florets
1 Red Onion, Halved & Roasted in Skin
50g Carrots
50g Peas

Dessert - Dark Chocolate & Berries:

100g Raspberries
100g Grapes
100g Strawberries
30g Dark Chocolate, Melted

Dinner - Leftover Vegetable Soup:

100g chopped raw vegetables, such as onions, celery and carrots
150g potatoes
1 tsp oil
350ml stock

It’s not just about **weight loss**.

Congratulations! You’ve made it through a week of (hopefully) tasty, healthy, nutritious food - and you’re hopefully feeling better as a result.

But if you’re going to step on the scales tomorrow, focus on what’s really important. It’s not just about weight loss - and if you’ve been yo-yo dieting before this, it might take a little while for the scales to start moving as fast as you might expect.

It takes a little while to get away from a mindset that’s focused on the scales - and trying to lose fat and gain muscle can mean that sometimes, you’ll step on the scales and feel as though you’re going backwards.

It’s important to focus on the long-term changes, and the big differences these will make to your life. Permanently.

This week, you’ve taken control of your health, cooked some nutritious meals, increased your activity levels, and spent some time focusing on your all-round well-being. These are all big achievements - so give yourself a high five!
A Word on Nutrition

I’ve published this post previously as part of my “Where Do I Start?” series - but it’s worth a read to remind yourself of the key principles of good nutrition, so that you can make the right choices going forward!

I’ve asked Matt to help me with this post, because he’s a nutritionist (who actually won the Contribution to Physical Activity award at the Worcester Sports Awards recently for this very programme – wool), so this is kind of his specialist subject. I can’t over-estimate how much of a fountain of knowledge he is, so there’s a heck of a lot to say on this subject – but this is just a ‘beginner’s guide.’

Despite that – it’s long. So go make a cup of tea, and then get comfortable. This is going to take considerably longer than just saying ‘you are only allowed to eat cabbage soup’ because it’s more complicated than that. But it’s also totally worth it.

The thing about nutrition – certainly to my mind – is that it’s really simple, but for some reason, the education on what makes a healthy, balanced diet just doesn’t seem to be there. The information is available, especially with websites like the British Nutrition Foundation providing all sorts of healthy guidance – but it doesn’t seem to manage to quite get through to most of us. I know before I started this programme, I thought it was as simple as ‘eat less, move more’ – and to an extent, that’s true – but calorie restricted diets just aren’t feasible in the long-term.

Here’s why, from Matt:

“The body is a really, really amazing machine. It’s resilient, and has an astounding ability to overcome difficult situations – that’s why we’ve survived as a species in all conditions, across the globe. Our bodies are incredibly adaptive.

So when you go on a calorie-restricted diet, your body adapts to that, just as it would any other situation. The body’s mechanism for coping with restricted periods of food intake is to go into a sort of “Sleep Mode” – storing and saving as much power and energy as it can.

It’ll perform the tasks you normally do more efficiently, because it knows that there probably won’t be enough calories to go at full capacity – and any excess it does find it’ll store as fat to prepare for the prolonged periods where it doesn’t feel you’re eating enough. That’s why you can lose weight this way, but still be quite ‘flabby’ – because the number on the scale is going down, but the body’s actually storing more fat.”

So dramatically reducing your calorie intake just doesn’t work, if you’re looking to get healthy, svelte and toned. Which, let’s face it, is exactly what we all want to be. It’s the trifecta of sexy-booty-ness, which is a word I just made up – but I think you’ll agree, it’s awesome.

The good side of your body being so adaptive, though, is that when it’s getting all the right things, in the right balance, it’ll adapt to that too – which is why the whole ‘lifestyle change’ thing is so crucial. Change your life, and your body will keep up to make sure you’re running as efficiently as possible – and if you’re making the change from an unbalanced, unhealthy diet to a good one, you can pretty much guarantee you’ll lose weight (and crucially – keep it off.)

Good nutrition is a matter of having a little of everything. Understanding that your body needs protein, carbohydrates, and fats in the right balance is key, because each of these things has a different role to play in keeping your body as efficient and healthy as possible. Carbohydrates, as well as being an important energy source, are necessary for transporting some of the nutrients (among other things) around the body; protein helps to build muscle; and fats provide essential fatty acids, and helps the body to absorb certain vitamins that it can’t make the most of without fat to dissolve them.

These nutrients do lots of other things too – but what I’m getting at here is that they’re all important in different ways. Cutting out fat, or cutting out carbs, will only ever set you back in the end.
Now, the trouble is with this balanced diet malarkey is that I can’t (yet) give you a shopping list of things you have to buy and send you on your way to better health. The cabbage soup diet it ain’t – although hopefully once we’ve finished the meal plan, there’ll be something a little more solid to go on.

From the British Nutrition Foundation’s website:

“Our diets should be based on bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods and rich in fruit and vegetables. A variety of foods from these two groups should make up two-thirds of the food we eat.

Most of the remaining third of the diet should be made up of milk and dairy foods, meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein, with limited amounts of foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar. Most of us eat too much salt and it is a good idea to check food labels to find those with a lower salt content and to minimise the amount of salt you add to food at home.”

Sounds pretty simple. And if you’re more the visual type, the Eat Well Plate (which I’ve mentioned briefly before) is a really good illustration of how that measures up in real terms:

The eatwell plate

Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.

If your food over the course of a given day looks something like that, you’re doing all the right things. The thing you’ll notice is that most of the categories – with the exception of “Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar” – are not processed foods. They’re ingredients. That’s why I tend to avoid processed stuff where I can – because it’s usually a pretty safe bet that if it comes in a packet and has a two year shelf-life, it’s probably chock full of sugar and fat, not to mention all sorts of crazy chemicals that just have no place in my diet.

The key is keeping it simple – and tasty.

One way to assess where you’re going wrong, nutritionally, is to write down everything you eat for a couple of days, and then compare it to that. I didn’t realise how much sugar I was eating until I started writing it all down at first – but spending time thinking about what you’re currently doing is a good way to start sorting out your diet.

If you’re not a big fan of cooking, or even if you’re a bit of a gourmet chef, the food you eat when you’re not thinking about it reflects who you are, and your relationship with food. Taking an honest look at your own resources – be they financial, skills-wise or even just taste – is a necessary step in moving forward into positive changes. That’s why it’s so important to be educated on nutrition as a whole, rather than just deciding you have to cut carbs, or starve, or whatever – this sort of knowledge gives you the power to make your own decisions and actually eat food you enjoy whilst still living a healthy lifestyle.
I know that’s kind of annoying – because personally, I’d love to be able to provide a list of ‘five things you have to do to lose weight’ and leave it at that. If only it were that simple. But while all this seems intimidating at first, once you start to understand it, you’ll find you’re more in tune with your body, and you’ll see the rewards of your learning.

The thing I’ve learned about nutrition, more than anything else, is that in a balanced diet, one treat, or one day where all you eat is toast, cake and curry because you have a hangover (I have done that – recently – no shame) will not make you gain ten pounds. It’s not like when you’re on a diet, where the logic is that everything has to be restricted and that one ‘cheat’ automatically means you’re a failure.

Lifestyle should be just that – life. Eating well, and being happy, means having a little of everything – and not feeling guilty about it. The 80/20 rule is a good one to go by, because if you’re doing everything right 80% of the time, the 20% where you’re not won’t really matter. I mean, I personally know that I can’t have a whole packet of biscuits in my cupboards because I will gnaw my way through them without even thinking about it. But if I’ve got a craving for a sweet fix, I’ll go out and do it – but I’ll just buy as much as I need.

It’s about balance, and understanding that it’s (feel free to yawn here) a lifestyle change. I’m living it – and I know it’s a permanent thing, rather than just something I’ll do until I reach my target weight. Because diet logic usually means celebrating reaching your goals with a family sized bucket of fried chicken. I, on the other hand, feel like I’ve been in ‘maintenance mode’ for months, now – even though I’m continuing to lose fat at the same rate as before. My diet is balanced already for my target weight – so no change is required, which means I don’t have to worry about yo-yo diets or weight gain. I’ve got it all covered.

Food is a big part of your life – and, as has been pointed out many times before, it’s not something you can just ‘cut out’ like you can if you have an issue with, say, smoking, or alcohol. It’s there to provide fuel, to keep your body running, and – importantly – to be enjoyed. It is totally possible to have a healthy relationship with food, as both a fuel source and a pleasure, while losing weight – but you do have to be patient and take the time to really understand it.

It’s a learning process, but one which pays dividends in the long-term – and with obesity predicted to top 60% in some US states by 2030, there’s no better time to start learning it. Not just for yourself, or for the ten, twenty, or two hundred pounds you need to lose – but for future generations too. It’s possible to eat better, and be happier, by making small changes to your life – and I promise, the investment you make in learning it now will pay off.

After all... You are what you eat.
Contact **Fat Girl PhD**

I’m always glad to hear from you guys - so please do get in touch!

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I’m always open to new ideas about posts, interviews and the like, so don’t be afraid to drop me an email if you’d like to hear any more about me or Matt and his programme!

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**Disclaimer & Legal Stuff**

I’m sure it goes without saying - but you should always consult with your doctor before starting out on a new diet and fitness programme, especially if you’ve got any underlying medical conditions.

Everything in this guide is the exclusive copyright of Katie Lowe and Matt Peacock (obviously - we wrote it!) and if we find you stealing it without permission, we’ll send someone to break your legs. That’s why I’m building the muscles, duh.

It’s also important to point out that we’re not dieticians or doctors (unless you count my part-completed PhD... In English Literature) so the advice we’re offering here is from our own experience. This means that if you decide to follow it, we can’t be legally held responsible or liable if it doesn’t work for you, or if you experience any adverse side effects as a result - because different things work for different people, and just as there isn’t just one cause of obesity, there isn’t one solution either.

If you choose not to obtain the consent of your physician and/or work with your physician while using any information herein, you are agreeing to accept full responsibility for your actions - but with all that said...

**Good luck!**