

Living on a Nutritional Budget

The concept of a nutritional budget

I think we can all agree that any *smart* person would spend his/her money on food, rent, electricity, fuel etc., because today, these are any human's basic necessities and unless those are covered everything else including Coach handbags and Mont Blanc wallets means zilch!

Similarly, considering the genetics you possess and your current level of activity, let's say 2,000 calories is what you can afford to eat on a daily basis. What will you spend your calories on? Real foods that nourish you with all nutrients you need or on junk food?

I know the act of eating junk food momentarily makes you feel good... real good. But that isn't very different from the feeling you get when you buy expensive shoes or walk into a restaurant you can't afford. While an occasional episode of prioritizing immediate *wants* over long term *needs* is completely acceptable and safe, what happens when this becomes a habit? Financial/nutritional deterioration happens.

But let's talk reality here. Not too many people spend all their money on fluff or eat purely junk food. But most people lose track of what percentage of their income/calories goes to what. So then, how should you plan your finances when you're on a budget? And how should you plan your nutrition when you're looking to lose fat? The answer to both questions is - by getting your priorities right!

Let me explain.

Get your priorities right

When it comes to fat loss, what has worked for me and for the thousands of people I work with is the 70:20:10 rule.

- 70% (or more) of your calories should come from nutritionally rich wholesome real foods like vegetables, fruits, dairy, lentils, legumes, beans, nuts, eggs and meat. (Tier A)
- 20% (or less) of your calories can come from foods that are nutritionally inferior or empty but not detrimental to health like rice, oats, ragi, dosa, idly, other gluten free starch, flavored yogurt/milk etc. (Tier B)
- 10% (or less) of your calories can come from foods that I call 'whatever floats your boat' and this mostly includes foods like pizza, ice cream, french fries etc. (Tier C)

The numbers above might make you think you'll need to count calories in order to follow this approach but fortunately for you I have some cool ideas that will help you adhere to this rule without obsessing about calories.

Option 1: Plan the day

Assuming you eat 3 reasonably sized meals everyday...

- Ensure two meals contain only tier A foods.
- Your third meal can be composed of foods from tier B and a small amount from tier C.

Option 2: Plan the week

Assuming you eat 21 reasonably sized meals every week,

Ensure that 15 of these meals contain only tier A foods.

- 4 meals can be based on tier B foods.
- And the remaining 2 meals can be filled with tier C foods i.e. go crazy and eat whatever the hell you want!

In Conclusion

Like how someone who has their priorities wrong with respect to finances will struggle to make a comfortable living in the long term, anyone who has their nutritional priorities wrong will struggle to stay fit and healthy in the long term.

So get your priorities right! Satisfy your needs first by eating nutritionally abundant real foods. Once that is done, be sure to give in to those wants every once in a while and live it up!

Note: This article was originally published on The Hindu Metroplus