



MMA MEAL PLAN

By Jamison Hill
CPT, Nutritional Specialist



Mixed martial arts (MMA) is a sport unlike any other. We all see the hype and spectacle on TV or live if we are lucky. What we don't often see is the intense training and dedicated diets that go on behind the scenes. MMA fighters prepare months for a fight. Even more, they train in various martial arts for years before actually facing-off. Blood, sweat and bruises are all worn out of pride. These fearless, adrenaline-seeking combatants put their bodies and well-being on the line every time they face each other. MMA athletes are very multi-faceted - they are required to have the energy to train for hours each day, but also maintain a weight that allows them to be within range of their fighting weight.

For MMA athletes, there are two types of making weight for their fights - dropping and cutting. Omar Lima, trainer and mixed martial artist with over a decade experience, separates the two by saying, "Dropping weight means losing actual pounds of weight, while cutting weight means losing water weight to make weigh ins." This distinction between the two body manipulation techniques is fairly simple as Lima explains - cutting is typically reserved for the time directly before a fight, whereas dropping is commenced in the weeks preceding a fight.

Dropping Weight

These two types of making weight rely heavily on a fighter's dedication to his craft. It is essentially useless to train in mixed martial arts for a fight if someone can't make their weight class at weigh-in. Making weight is the be-all & end-all for MMA fighters. Obviously, this is more difficult for some, depending on their weight class and current weight. For those that have to drop significant weight, food and nutrition are their primary method of doing so. With that said, this method is much more than just restricting calories. A fighter has to pay



extra close attention to macronutrient ratios - carbohydrates and proteins in particular. MMA athletes need carbs and protein to fuel their grueling workouts, maintain muscle and aid in recovery. Typically, they stick to a meal plan with a 2:1:1 macronutrient ratio (50% Carbs, 25% Protein, 25% Fat) spread over six meals.

As demonstrated in the MMA meal plan, a fighter's ordinary (2:1:1 ratio) meal has approximately double the amount of protein as carbs and fats. The protein in this meal is provided by primarily eggs (egg albumin). Oats and whole-grain bread fulfill the carb requirement and almond butter is included for extra energy coming from unsaturated fats.

Post-Workout Meal

Another important nutritional aspect for fighters is their post-workout meal. This is the one meal that deviates from the other fight preparation meals; it is recommended that those training in MMA consume a post-workout meal consisting both of significant carbohydrates and proteins. Lima recommends consuming a post workout shake with a carb to protein ratio of 4:1. For example, if a fighter were consuming a meal of 500 calories, ideally 400 would come from carbs and 100 from protein. You can see a better example of this scenario in the post-work meal provided. Of course, fats are also an important nutritional consideration, but for post-workout purposes they are overshadowed by their macronutrient counterparts. A carbohydrate rich post-workout meal or shake is essential for replenishing glycogen stores in the muscle along with providing sustainable energy for future workouts. They also provide important and sufficient protein for muscle building and recovery functions.

The post-workout meal is mainly comprised of protein and carbs with emphasis on carbs, specifically those that are quick metabolizing (organic honey). A significant amount of protein (24g) is provided by whey protein.

2:1:1 Meal	Amount	Protein	Carbs	Fats	Calories
Egg (Organic)	200.0	25.0	0.0	21.6	294.4
Oats (Traditional)	60.0	6.6	36.0	4.8	213.6
Whole-Grain/Protein Bread	70.0	8.3	30.5	1.0	164.0
Almond Butter	20.0	3.6	4.3	12.1	140.6
Total		43.4	70.7	39.6	812.6
Post-Workout Meal	Grams	Protein	Carbs	Fats	Calories
Whey Protein Powder	24.0	16.8	2.5	1.3	88.9
Almond Milk (Organic)	300.0	6.0	30.0	7.5	211.5
Whole-Grain/Protein Bread	35.0	4.1	15.2	0.5	82.0
Organic Honey	20.0	0.1	16.5	0.0	66.2
Banana	150.0	1.2	23.0	0.3	99.3
Total		28.24	87.18	9.58	547.87

The more complex carbs included are whole-grain bread, banana and almond milk. These serve as slow digesting, more complex carbs for longer lasting energy.

The majority of a fighter's six meals stick to the 2:1:1 ratio, while the post-workout meal differs somewhat because it lies within a very time sensitive nutrient absorption window. It is recommended that it be consumed within 30 minutes after ceasing exercise, preferably in liquid shake form. Lima explains that, "some suggest consuming this shake before, during and after exercise to maximize protein synthesis." The main purpose of this meal is to replenish your muscles in their most optimal and sensitive state. A post-workout meal can drastically affect a fighter's future workouts, resulting in either positive or negative effects. Without a proper meal immediately following a workout, MMA athletes will suffer in performance and potentially in their fight.

Cutting Weight

The other useful body weight manipulation technique is cutting weight by water weight manipulation. According to Lima, most MMA athletes typically consume .5-1 liquid ounces of water per pound of body weight on a daily basis. To cut weight, however,

water intake changes significantly. One week prior to a fight, water intake is drastically reduced until after weigh-ins. This can put a fighter in a dehydrated state, which requires drastic rehydration, usually administered intravenously after weigh-ins and within the 24 hours prior to a fight.

The MMA meal plan companioned with this article is a fairly basic plan and is entirely general. It is meant more for educational and motivational purposes than for adoption. A significant and effective meal plan of any kind should always be customized based on the individual. For the most part, macronutrient requirements stay consistent from fighter to fighter, whereas caloric requirements almost always differ. For instance, a fighter that weighs 200 pounds as opposed to 150 pounds is going to have a different daily caloric requirement and consequently a need for a different meal plan. It is important to keep this in mind as you are looking for a meal plan to try. In doing so, many factors like weight, conditioning level, training methods and goals should all be taken into consideration. Take all of these aspects into account when designing or attempting a meal plan, and your potential for success will increase dramatically. **12**