50/50 Rule for Meats and Cheeses

This simple formula will help you make the right choices of what meats and cheeses to eat to hit your macros and stay lean.

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One of my favorite types of foods are dried and cut (aka "cured") meats like prosciutto, pepperoni, salami, and capocollo. For one, I grew up snacking on these meats as an Italian kid, so it's sort of in my DNA. Aside from that, I'm always up for a convenient low-carb, high protein food option for building muscle without adding body fat, and cured meats have become more available in recent years at supermarkets and even convenience stores.

As you may know, however, cured meats are often very high in fat, so you need to be careful not to overconsume these foods, which is very easy to do! Same goes for cheese, a common companion to dried and cut meats – cheese is both delicious and low in carbs, but it can also be fatty.

If you've followed my Dieting 101 and Muscle-Building Rules meal plans, you know that I believe in getting roughly 2-3 times as much protein than dietary fat every day in order to build muscle while also losing body fat. Considering that many cured meats and cheeses actually contain more fat than protein, you can see how eating too much of these foods could throw off your macros.

So, to help you keep your intake of these foods in check, I've come up with a very simple rule to help guide you on what cured meats and cheeses to choose – my **50/50 Rule**.

The 50/50 Rule is simple: The meat or cheese you're eating should be no more than 50% fat and at least 50% protein. In other words, you want there to be more protein than fat in the meat or cheese or you're eating, or at the very least an equal amount of each (a 1:1 ratio of fat to protein).

For example, if a cured meat you're looking at has 10 grams of fat per serving and only 5 grams of protein, opt for something leaner. On the other hand, if it has 5 grams of fat and 10 grams of protein, you're good to go. If it has equal grams of fat and protein (say, 10 grams of fat, 10 grams of protein), that's acceptable though borderline.

To learn why high protein intake is so important to hitting your goals, read my High Protein, Huge Benefits three-part article series.

Choosing the Best Meats and Cheeses with the 50/50 Rule

All you have to do to figure out the ratio of fat to protein is look at the Nutrition Facts label of the food in question. But to give you an idea of what the fat-to-protein ratio is of some different cured meats and cheeses, here's a chart for quick reference:

Fat and Protein Content in Cured Meats and Cheeses

Food	Fat (g)	Protein (g)	Fat to Protein Ratio (%Fat/%Protein)	50/50 Rule Approved?

Meats

Capocollo	7	8	47/53	Yes
Genoa Salami	14	12	53/47	Borderline
Hard Salami	12	6	67/33	No
Mortadella	25	14	64/36	No
Pancetta	18	10	64/36	No
Pepperoni	13	5	72/28	No
Prosciutto	3	8	27/73	Yes
Serrano	1	2	33/67	Yes
Soppressata	6	7	46/54	Yes
Cheeses				
American	6	4	60/40	No
Brie	9	5	64/36	No
Cheddar	9	7	56/44	Borderline
Gouda	9	7	56/44	Borderline
Mozzarella	6	5	55/45	Borderline
Provolone	8	7	53/47	Borderline
Swiss	6	6	50/50	Yes

All nutrition facts in this chart are per serving, courtesy of the U.S.D.A. (usda.gov).

As you can see from the chart, most cheeses exceed the 50/50 ratio or are borderline. Fornutately, most popular types of cheeses are also available with reduced fat , with protein content staying the same. So if you're concerned about the fat content if your favorite cheese, by all means opt for a low-fat version of it.

What About Keto Diets?

If you're following a ketogenic diet, perhaps you can eat high fat, moderate protein foods like cured meats and cheeses more liberally. But personally, I'm not a big fan of keto for getting lean and muscular.

Why don't I like keto? Simple: Because of fat loss plateaus. With keto, you essentially drop your carb intake to next to nothing right from the start. This is why so many people lose weight quickly – within weeks – when following keto.

But sooner or later (usually sooner), fat loss will plateau, no matter what diet you're following. At that point, your carbs are already so low, you have no room to drop them further! And since dropping carbs is the simplest way to lose body fat, how do you overcome a plateau when your carbs have no place to go but up? Drop protein or fat? That's not a great idea, since protein and fat are both essential nutrients you need to build muscle and even optimize health.

Granted, you can continue to lose fat on a keto diet for several months, but in the grand scheme of things, that's not a very long time. You really should be looking for a diet you can follow with good results for *years*, not months.

The whole premise behind my Dieting 101 protocol is to start with *the highest possible carb intake* that still allows you to drop body fat. This way, when fat loss plateaus, you'll have plenty of room to drop carbs further to drop more fat. I always recommend dropping carbs gradually over time, not all at once like most people do with keto.

Plus, sustainability is important. If you can't stick to a diet, what's the point of doing it? Keto is tough to stick to long term, and the reason is pretty simple: Because carbs are very enjoyable! And if you're not letting yourself eat even a piece of fruit, let alone the occasional donut or a couple slices of pizza, at some point you'll probably cave and start eating those foods again. At that point, your keto diet is history!

With Dieting 101, you have room to splurge a bit with high-carb foods. Not only do I implement a weekly [cheat day](#) on Dieting 101, but even on non-cheat days you have some wiggle room on carbs.

For more details on exactly how to drop carbs gradually and systematically for continued fat loss, read my full [Dieting 101 article](#).
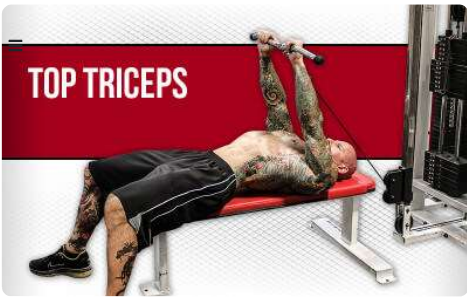
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