

# CARB CYCLING



**As MMA fighters, we're constantly looking for ways to improve our game. We sharpen our skills, improve our conditioning, increase our strength, all with the goal of being better warriors. But many of us fail to take advantage of a very important key to success in the ring (or cage), and that is optimal nutrition.**

by **Shelby Starnes**

How many of you are exactly the weight you want to be right now? How many of you currently possess your "ideal physique"? If you're like many of us, you probably have some



extra "fluff" weighing you down, that once lost, could substantially improve your speed and agility (not to mention your "game" with the opposite sex!). Perhaps you're on the other end of the weight spectrum and could stand to gain some extra "buff" to help you overpower your opponents and bring more force to your strikes and grappling. Well there's a method of eating that addresses *either* of these scenarios, all the while having plenty of energy to continue pursuing your skill, conditioning and strength goals.

The method is called carbohydrate cycling. Its main premise relies on exploiting your body's insulin levels via cycling your daily carbohydrate intake to maximize its anabolic (muscle building) and anticatabolic (muscle sparing) effects. At the same time, cycling will minimize your body's ability to store fat and maximize your body's ability to burn fat.

*How do we do that, you ask? Let's get started!*

## IN A NUTSHELL

Put in simple terms, we consume a *high-carbohydrate diet* on some days of the week (typically our most physically demanding days, i.e. training days or days of heavy skill work) and a *low to moderate carbohydrate diet* on the other days (typically days that are less physically demanding, or rest days). The high carbohydrate days raise our insulin levels, fill our glycogen stores, keep our metabolism burning efficiently, and stave off muscle catabolism. The low carbohydrate days are the "fat-burning days" – keeping insulin levels lower to allow for maximum fat burning while retaining muscle.

If your goal is to lose fat (and retain or even gain muscle) then you will only have one or two "high-carb days" per week, the other five or six days being your low to moderate carb days. If your goal is to gain muscle (while keeping fat gain to a minimum), go with two to four of these high carb days (the number will depend on your metabolism and work load, i.e. how many days per week you train, and at what intensity), the rest of the week being low to moderate carb days.

## MACRONUTRIENTS AND MEAL FREQUENCY

The macronutrients are carbohydrates, proteins and fats. Though this diet is called carbohydrate cycling, manipulation of your protein and fat intake will also play a key role. The following are general guidelines for each macronutrient on a typical high carb day, and a typical low to moderate carb day. Note that we lower protein on our high carb days and also keep fat as low as possible. Also keep in mind that for optimal blood sugar levels, metabolism and amino acid turnover, it is best to divide your daily totals into 5-7 meals per day (about every 3 hours or so).

DAY	CARBOHYDRATE	PROTEIN	FAT
High Carb Day	2-3g per lb / bw	1-1.5g per lb / bw	as low as possible
Low to Moderate Carb Day	.5-1.5 grams per lb. of bw	1.25-1.75g per lb / bw	.25-.5g per lb / bw

## EXAMPLE SET-UP

Here's how to use the funky table with a 200-pound fighter as our example:

### On a high carb day, our fighter would shoot for the following totals:

- 500 grams of carbohydrates (200lbs. x 2.5)
- 250 grams of protein (200lbs. x 1.25)
- 30 grams of fat (while we aim to keep fat as low as possible on high carb days, there will always be an incidental amount in the foods we eat)

Dividing these numbers evenly over 6 meals, we get approximately 83 grams of carbohydrates per meal, 42 grams of protein and 5 grams of fat.

### A low carb day for the same fighter might look something like this:

- 200 grams of carbohydrates (200lbs. x 1.0)
- 300 grams of protein (200lbs x 1.5)
- 70 grams of fat (200lbs x .35)

Again, dividing these numbers evenly over 6 meals gives us approximately 33 grams carbohydrates per meal, 50 grams of protein and 12 grams of fat.

A sample week of carbohydrate cycling for a fighter looking to lean out might look like this:

Monday: MMA training and cardio / conditioning work: low carb

Tuesday: Weight Training: high carb

Wednesday: MMA training and cardio / conditioning work: low carb

Thursday: Rest day: low carb

Friday: Weight Training: high carb

Saturday: MMA training and cardio / conditioning work: low carb

Sunday: Conditioning work: low carb

The days and set-up will vary depending on your own situation and goals. Just remember that if you're trying to gain weight, use more high carb days (3-4 per week). If you're trying to lean out, then only go with one or two high days per week. On your low carb days, look at

taking carbs all the way down to .5 grams per pound of body weight.

If your MMA days are more demanding than your weight training days, look at making them your high carb days. Also try to space out your high days during the week by having them back-to-back which can lower your insulin sensitivity, a key goal with carb cycling in the first place.

*Okay, what do I eat?*

Not cheeseburgers and ice cream! Stick to healthy whole foods for this diet. If you can't kill it, grow it or pick it, you probably shouldn't be eating it! Here are some examples for each macronutrient category:

Carbohydrates: oatmeal, brown rice, potatoes and yams, fruit

Proteins: chicken breast, turkey breast, lean red meat, eggs, fish, low fat cottage cheese

Fats: almonds, cashews, all-natural peanut butter, olive oil, flax oil, fish oil, avocados

## WRAP-UP

Not only is this diet "the bomb" in terms of results and ease of use, it's also very easy mentally. It's a lot easier to push through a day of lower carbs when we know we have a day of high carbs coming up! Using the guidelines above, you should be able to set up a diet that will not only allow you to reach your physique and training goals, but also improve your health and well being. What more could you ask for? (Cheeseburgers and ice cream, right?)



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