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FITNESS

The No-Nonsense Nutrition Guide for Busy Professionals

By Scott Tischler · July 28, 2026 · 8 min read

I've competed in natural bodybuilding, trained seriously for decades, and run companies the whole time. So I have zero patience for nutrition advice that assumes you have two free hours a day and a personal chef. The truth is that the people who stay lean and strong for thirty years aren't the ones with the most extreme diet. They're the ones with a **system simple enough to run on their worst day** — the day with back-to-back meetings, a flight, and dinner at 9 p.m.

This is that system. Nothing here is a fad, and none of it requires you to weigh your food forever. Think of it as the operating principles I actually use, not a meal plan you'll abandon in three weeks.

One note up front: this is general education, not medical or dietary advice. If you have a health condition, take medication, or have a history of disordered eating, talk to a physician or registered dietitian before making big changes.

What actually drives results, in order

Most people obsess over the details that matter least. Here's the honest hierarchy of what moves the needle, from most to least important.

Priority	What it is	Why it matters most
1	Total calories	Decides whether you gain, lose, or maintain — nothing overrides it
2	Protein	Protects muscle, controls hunger, costs the least willpower
3	Whole foods & fiber	Keeps you full, steadies energy, covers micronutrients
4	Meal timing & consistency	Helps adherence and training, not magic on its own
5	Supplements	A small finishing touch, never the foundation

If you get the top two right most of the time, you're ahead of nearly everyone — no app required.

Build every meal around protein first

The single highest-leverage habit is deciding your protein, then building the rest of the plate around it. Protein is the most satiating macronutrient, it's the hardest to overeat, and it's what preserves muscle when you're busy, stressed, or in a calorie deficit.

A practical target for most active adults is roughly **0.7 to 1 gram of protein per pound of goal body weight** per day. You don't need to hit it to the gram. What you need is a **protein anchor at every meal**: eggs, Greek yogurt, chicken, fish, lean beef, tofu, or a quality protein shake. Anchor the meal, then add vegetables and a carb or fat source to taste.

The "default meals" trick

Decision fatigue is the real enemy of a busy person's diet. The fix is to **remove decisions**, not add discipline. Pick three or four meals you genuinely like, that hit your protein anchor, and rotate them as defaults. I eat close to the same breakfast and lunch most weekdays and save variety for dinner. That's not boring — it's what frees my willpower for the parts of the day that actually need it.

Control calories without tracking every bite

You don't have to log food forever to manage intake. Portion awareness plus a few rules gets most people 90% of the way there.

- **Use your hand as a scale.** A palm of protein, a fist of vegetables, a cupped handful of carbs, and a thumb of fats is a reasonable meal for most people. Adjust up or down based on the mirror and the scale over a few weeks.
- **Make the default drink zero-calorie.** Liquid calories from soda, juice, sugary coffees, and alcohol are the quietest way to blow past your target. Water, sparkling water, black coffee, and tea should be the defaults; treat the rest as occasional.
- **Protein and produce first.** Eat the protein and vegetables on your plate before the starch. You'll naturally eat less of the calorie-dense stuff because you're already fuller.
- **Weigh yourself weekly, not daily-obsessively.** Track the weekly average trend, not the daily noise, and adjust portions only if the trend is going the wrong way for two to three weeks.

Tracking calories in an app for a week or two is genuinely useful — as **education**, so you learn what portions actually look like. Then you can put the app down and run on the habits.

Eat well when you're traveling or slammed

This is where most professionals fall apart, so it deserves its own playbook. The goal isn't perfection on the road — it's **not going backward**.

- **Airports and gas stations have protein now.** Jerky, Greek yogurt, hard-boiled eggs, protein bars, rotisserie chicken, and shakes are everywhere. Grab the protein anchor first.
- **Order restaurant meals in the same shape.** A protein plus vegetables plus a controlled carb works at almost any restaurant. Sauces and fried sides are where the hidden calories live — get them on the side.
- **Keep a travel default.** I keep protein powder or a couple of bars in my bag. A shake covers the meal I'd otherwise skip or replace with junk.
- **Aim for "good enough" on hard days.** Hitting your protein and not overdoing calories on a travel day is a win. Consistency across the month beats perfection across a weekend.

The habits that beat any diet

Fancy diets come and go. What actually separates people who stay in shape for decades is a short list of boring habits, done relentlessly.

- **Protein at every meal.** Non-negotiable. It quietly solves hunger and muscle retention at the same time.
- **Mostly whole foods.** Not exclusively — mostly. The 80/20 approach is sustainable; 100% restriction is not.
- **Hydration and sleep.** Under-slept, dehydrated people make worse food decisions all day. This is nutrition even though it isn't food.
- **Plan the environment, not just the willpower.** Keep good defaults stocked and junk out of easy reach. You'll win most battles by never having to fight them.

What about supplements?

Supplements are the last 5%, and they only matter once the first 95% is handled. A few have decent evidence and are hard to mess up: **protein powder** as a convenient way to hit your target, **creatine monohydrate** for strength and recovery, **vitamin D** if you're deficient, and possibly a basic **fish oil** and a multivitamin as insurance. Everything else is mostly marketing. No pill offsets a diet that isn't built on the fundamentals above.

Key takeaways

- ② The order of importance is calories, then protein, then whole foods, then timing, then supplements — most people invert it.
- ② Anchor every meal with a protein source and build the rest of the plate around it.
- ② You don't need to track forever; log for a week or two to learn portions, then run on habits.
- ② Liquid calories are the quietest way to overeat — make your default drink zero-calorie.
- ② Use "default meals" to remove decisions instead of relying on willpower.
- ② On travel and slammed days, aim for "good enough" — hit protein, don't overdo calories, and don't go backward.

Frequently asked questions

How much protein should a busy professional eat?

A practical target for most active adults is roughly 0.7 to 1 gram of protein per pound of goal body weight per day. The easiest way to get there without math is to include a protein anchor — eggs, yogurt, chicken, fish, lean beef, tofu, or a shake — at every meal. You don't need to hit it exactly; consistency matters more than precision.

Do I have to count calories to lose weight?

No. Counting calories in an app for a week or two is genuinely useful as education so you learn what portions look like, but you don't have to do it forever. Portion awareness — using your hand as a rough scale — plus a few rules like protein-first and zero-calorie drinks gets most people where they need to be.

What's the single most important nutrition habit?

Eating enough protein at every meal. It's the most satiating macronutrient, it protects muscle when you're busy or in a deficit, and it costs the least willpower because it naturally reduces hunger. If you fix only one thing, fix protein.

How do I eat well while traveling?

Grab a protein anchor first — airports and gas stations now carry jerky, Greek yogurt, eggs, rotisserie chicken, protein bars, and shakes. Order restaurant meals as protein plus vegetables plus a controlled carb, with sauces and fried sides on the side, and keep a travel default like protein powder or bars in your bag. The goal on the road is not going backward, not perfection.

Are cheat meals okay?

Yes, within a mostly-whole-foods approach. An 80/20 pattern — where roughly 80% of your intake is whole, minimally processed food and 20% is flexible — is sustainable for decades, while 100% restriction almost always collapses. The occasional planned indulgence actually improves long-term adherence.

Which supplements are actually worth taking?

Only after the fundamentals are handled, a short list has decent evidence and is hard to misuse: protein powder for convenience, creatine monohydrate for strength and recovery, vitamin D if you're deficient, and possibly fish oil and a basic multivitamin as insurance. Everything beyond that is mostly marketing, and no supplement offsets a poor overall diet.

How often should I weigh myself?

Track the weekly average trend rather than obsessing over daily numbers, which bounce around due to water, sodium, and digestion. Only adjust your portions if the trend moves the wrong way for two to three consecutive weeks. This keeps you responsive without turning the scale into a source of daily stress.

Is meal timing important?

Far less than total calories and protein. Eating at consistent times can help your energy, training, and adherence, but there's nothing magical about a specific eating window for most people. Get the total amount and protein right first; optimize timing only if everything else is already dialed in.

About the author. Scott Tischler is the Founder & Chairman of Alrecommend.ai and a practitioner-authority on AI search and Answer Engine Optimization. With 20+ years in marketing technology — including American Express, MetLife, and UBS — and executive study at Wharton, Harvard, Yale, and Oxford, he helps businesses become the ones AI recommends.