

In April this year I was asked by the guys at Force to create a nutrition plan to compliment their 'Beach Ready' program. The brief I had to satisfy was simple; create a plan that would enable their clients to get the best from the beach ready program whilst being:

**Simple** – simple is always best. Over-complicated plans soon result in failure.

**Practical** – for adherence any plan must easily fit around an individual's lifestyle.

**Enjoyable** – again, for people to adhere to a plan then it must not make eating a chore. All meals should be enjoyable. No food stuffs were made off limit.

**Healthy** – No tiny daily allowances and starving, just safe, subtle calorie deficits and good quality whole foods and delicious recipes.

**Educational** – Enable the clients to learn about their relationship with food, see where they normally fall down and give them knowledge to take away for long term improved health and body composition.

The format of the plan was straight forward:

- 3 meals and 2 snacks each day – all of which to contain 20-30g of protein
- Minimum of 2 litres of water per day – 0.5 to be drunk upon waking and the rest consumed throughout the day.
- Plenty of fresh greens, salad and veg with each meal.
- Only consume carb rich food sources with the evening meal.

### **Weeks 1 - 6**

So the 'Beach Ready' program began in April and, being someone who believes in "practising what you preach" I too took up the challenge and followed the same nutrition protocol, albeit at an appropriate increased intake to account for my larger size (approx 2500 calories a day as appose to the 1500 of the ladies doing the beach ready).

To compliment the nutrition I initiated my own training plan consisting of just 4 x 60-90 minute weights sessions a week, adopting the less common but ever so effective Legs & Back (Monday & Thursday), Chest and Shoulders (Tuesday & Friday) split. Sessions were a mix of heavy low rep work to help maintain what strength I had and high volume just because I like it! No more. Certainly NO training on the weekend and DEFINATELY NO CARDIO!!! (I \*\*\*\*ing HATE cardio!)

As I had hoped, the plan was so easy to follow, after all that's how I had designed it. As such, adherence was never going to be an issue so, trying to lead by example, I stuck to it 100% for the entire 6 weeks duration of the first Beach Ready course. A typical days food would be:

7:00 Breakfast – 3 egg omelette with 75g of lean chopped ham or chicken with side of salad leaves.

10:00 Snack – 300g cottage cheese with flavour drops and berries mixed in.

13:00 Lunch – 200g sliced chicken breast with salad and dressing.

17:00 PWO Shake consisting of 50g whey powder and 1-2 pieces fruit.

20:00 Evening meal e.g. large serving spaghetti Bolognese or chicken curry and rice etc

22:30 Left-overs from the evening meal or some Quark with almond butter and fruit or protein pancakes. (this was an extra snack in addition to the beach ready plan that was needed to make up the calorie difference I required).

From the outset I knew that the nutrition plan would work if followed correctly. After all it was based on common sense with a sprinkling of basic science. Fool proof some might say. However, I must admit that even I was a little surprised to the extent of fat loss that was achieved in such a short space of time. I was getting results you normally see associated with super strict (read ridiculous) steamed fish, brown rice and broccoli 6 times a day x 7 days a week body builder-esque diets yet I was eating chillis, curries, burgers, kebabs, stews, casseroles and Sunday lunch with all the trimmings as part of my every day foods as well as the free/cheat meal on the weekend. Never once did it seem like a chore. Anyway, my 6 week results were as follows:

Date	12/04/2015	22/05/2015
Weight	107kg	102kg
Neck	17.5"	17"
Chest	48"	46"
Waist	38"	34"
Bicep	17.75"	17"
Thigh	27"	25.5"
Body Fat % est.	15	11



Outside of the aesthetics I was feeling good and there was even a slight improvement in sleep pattern. Furthermore, to this stage there had only been a slight dip in my strength as much of my lean muscle mass seemed to be holding tight.

### **Weeks 7 – 11**

So the nutrition plan worked well. It was simple, practical, enjoyable and healthy but also got very good results which got me wondering; how far could this sensible approach to fat loss really go?

There was only one way to answer that question. Carry on and see!

So I set out to continue for another 6 weeks; same nutrition format, same training.

Weeks 7 and 8 continued as the previous had ended. Adherence to the plan was easy, strength was holding and fat was, well, melting off. I was down to around 10% body fat and ready to go into the single figures. Great stuff.....so I soldiered on.....

However, as we all know, life likes to throw in a few obstacles to complicate issues and challenge our plan and, half way through week 9, my 'speed hump' came in the form of a little chap called Campylobacter or food poisoning to you and me. And by food poisoning we're not talking about a bit of an upset stomach for a day or so, oh no, this was the real deal and something I have never experienced before and never wish to again!!! We're talking fire and brimstone; the roman candle of defecation; an event similar to that which wiped out the dinosaurs, only concentrated in my arse!!! You get the picture so I won't dwell on it.

Thankfully for the duration of the illness I was still able to take on some decent nutrition to keep damage to a minimum. The combination of a good probiotic and some gut friendly meals seemed to speed up recovery. By the start of week 10, although still feeling weak and dehydrated I was able to return to eating normally and by the close of that week I was able to complete a couple of low intensity sessions.

Week 11 started with me back on track, a little lighter than planned and a notable loss in strength, but back at it none the less. Body fat had dropped noticeably so I was definitely into the single figures.

Training session on the Monday afternoon was tough; feeling weak and lacking motivation which I can only put down to the illness and the associated effects on glycogen stores etc so from Tuesday onwards I increased my daily intake by around 250-350kcal all of which consumed in the form of extra carbs, much of which eaten pre training to help fuel the session as I was running low on fat to burn. This seemed to do the trick and training intensity for the remainder of the week was close to where I wanted.

Feeling positive and with body fat easily the lowest I've ever been (not that I've tried that often as I prefer to carry some excess on my bones the majority of the time) I thought it was the perfect opportunity to have my first crack at a 'peak week' and see what happens. Nothing ventured, nothing gained!

### **Week 12 – Peak Week**

I have wanted to experiment with a 'peak week' for quite a while. It is something that I have been asked about a few times but, although I have read up a decent amount about it, was wary of commenting on for the simple reason I have not experienced it myself (this is an important thing for me as I will never advise anyone to do something I haven't tried myself). So at this juncture it was a decent (far from good as my body fat was still a little high for someone who'd be going on stage) opportunity to at least have a first attempt and see what I can learn from it.

At this point some of you may be wondering what the hell a 'Peak week' is. This is pretty understandable as, unless you have been in close proximity to an individual who has gone on stage to compete or prepped for a photo shoot, you would have no reason to know.

In short a peak week is the 5-7 days prior to a comp/photo shoot where an individual will manipulate nutrition/training/body so that they look their very 'best' on the day. It can be make or break and the deciding factor of who wins and the also rans. The individual wants to hit the stage with every muscle visible and full; skin as thin and tight as possible so they look like a real life human physiology model – granted it's not everyone's cup of tea I know but it's still very interesting!

Outside of the posing routines, shaving and tanning the basis of a peak week is:

- Removing water from beneath the skin known as 'drying out' – water blurs the definition thus you want it gone.
- Making the muscle appear 'full' on the day – fuller, bigger muscles look better obv!

Drying out – this is achieved by initially doing the complete opposite to what you would expect. For example, if working on a 6 day prep working to peak at day 6: Days 1-4 require you to consume huge amounts of water. The theory being that the excessive water triggers over production of the 'flushing' hormone, Aldosterone. On day 5 you dramatically cut water intake down to almost nothing whilst the hormone is still in high concentrations in the body continuing to flush out water. Result is net loss of water and body becoming dehydrated (dehydration is not normally a good thing but in this case its what you want!). To further remove water you can also throw in a natural diuretic on day 5.

Most people will also play around with their sodium and potassium intakes to try and influence where water is stored in the body. Quite frankly I don't know enough about this and there is a lot of conflicting evidence/reports on it which suggests that nobody really knows. As such I simply decided not to even bother with it, thus my salt intake remained status quo.

Filling out muscles – You're not going to add any lean muscle in 5 days, but you can alter the size and composition of the muscles you have to make them appear bigger. Muscle cells store glycogen and if you are able to top off the storage of this then the muscles will become denser, harder and full beyond previous threshold levels aka "super-compensation".

Once again, to achieve a state where the body wants to achieve super-compensation you must first do the opposite and remove or deplete the muscles of glycogen stores. In our example days 1-4 will be very low carb (<50g per day) combined with training routine to draw upon the existing stores. Then on day 5 you rapidly whack in plenty of starchy goodness to refill.

There is an added bonus to this refilling that aids the drying out further: Glycogen (carbohydrate store) is accompanied by increased plasma stores. Plasma requires water. As the glycogen is pulled back into the muscle it takes with it the plasma and water thus further reducing the water under the skin...well that's the theory!

So with all the theory out the way, what did my peak week consist of and how did it pan out?

I worked on a 6 day peak. Starting on Monday with the aim to look my 'best' on Saturday around midday.

#### Days 1-4

Day 1 I weighed in at 97kg. Nutrition followed a similar pattern to what it had in the previous weeks. The only real difference being the exclusion of any carb rich foods. No rice, pasta, potatoes, bread, fruit, cereal etc and being wary of the amount of berries, root veg and carby veg I was consuming. To compensate for the lack of carbs I increased my protein and fat intake through slight increase in protein portion sizes and the odd bit of 85% cocoa chocolate thrown in.

Training took on a different approach. High volume with a few sets of negative reps to deplete glycogen and then try to prevent it being restored.

The big difference was water intake. Days 1-3 I aimed to drink around 10 litres a day and day 4 15 litres. This equated to drinking 600ml of water every hour between 7am and 10pm, increasing to 900ml per hour on day 4. In reality I fell short by a couple of litres on each day as the opportunity to

get the water down my neck wasn't always there due to work, travelling to and from home and just doing normal everyday things. Add to this the difficulties involved in all that water coming back out; planning any excursion where you may be away from the porcelain throne for more than 20 minutes with military precision, mentally mapping each and every potential dewatering location. Needless to say by the end of day 4 I was sick at the sight of water....but little did I know that that feeling was to be short lived!

Day 5 – Friday was carbing up and drying out day and I started the day almost excited at the prospect, little did I know what was in store.

Meal timing stayed the same but each meal was lean with plenty of carbs, around 70g each sitting:

Before any carb intake I was weighing in at 96kg. Breakfast consisted of chicken breast a small glass of water with a large side of fruit. The idea behind this is that the fructose from the fruit quickly replenishes the glycogen stores in the liver so that the remainder of starchy carbs consumed during the day goes into filling out the glycogen stores in the muscle.

10am snack – chicken breast and 400g roasted sweet potato and just 100ml water. No more water was to be consumed between now and midday Saturday.

1pm – chicken breast and 400g roasted sweet potato. 4 x dandelion root diuretic tabs.

4pm – high carb protein bar x 2

7pm – Steak and 6 rice cakes. 4 x dandelion root diuretic tabs.

10pm – 30ml glycerine (sugar alcohol) and 50g sweets.

Reading through the above it sounds pretty easy. However, that day is probably the hardest thing I have ever done in my life, and that includes all the preseason sessions spent on the sand dunes! It was horrendous and sadly I don't have the ability to put the saga into words to convey it fully. To experience true thirst and prevent yourself from doing anything to quench it goes against all that your body is designed to do. By the late afternoon I was feeling drained, tired, agitated, angry and light headed. By evening I was in bits and, in a desperate attempt to quench my thirst somehow, in a moment of desperation I resorted to frantically drinking about 100ml of melted ice cream from my son's bowl like some sort of addict! I went to bed early and hoped to sleep through. I slept pretty well considering, only waking twice to go to the toilet...where that was coming from I have no idea?!

I woke Saturday morning with a gaunt face and sunken, red eyes but my muscles felt reasonably full, hard and dense and my skin was like paper so it would appear that it had all gone well!

At 8am I had a breakfast of a little Quark with whey powder with a bit of oat meal, followed by the same at 10am, still no water.

At 11:15 it was 30ml of glycerine washed down with a can of full sugar cola. My throat was so dry and sore from the drying out that I could almost feel every single bubble going down. Some measurements before a weigh in that saw me at just 90kg, suggesting I had shed around **7litres** of water in the drying out!

At 11:30 a serving of 'pump' supplement with the minimum water required for it to dissolve. Again, like drinking battery acid!

12:00pm a 20minute 'pump' session consisting of 2 sets of 12-15 reps of one isolation exercise per major muscle group (upper body only).



Date	12/04/2015	22/05/2015	04/07/2015	Difference Start/Finish
Weight	107kg	102kg	97kg (dried out 90kg)	-10kg
Neck	17.5"	17"	15.5"	-2"
Chest	48"	46"	46"	-2"
Waist	38"	34"	33"	-5"
Bicep	17.75"	17"	17"	-0.75"
Thigh	27"	25.5"	24.5"	-2.5"
Body Fat % est.	15	11	7	

**Summary** – For me the most important outcome of the whole 12 week experiment is that it shows that great aesthetic results can be achieved in a short space of time through simple, enjoyable nutrition. The only thing you need is CONSISTENCY.

Could I have taken it further? I have no doubt that if I had continued with the same regime for another 4-8 weeks I could easily have dropped the body fat a couple more percent still without need for more complex training or nutrition. However, I am not going to. Not because its difficult and I can't do it any longer but more to do with the fact that it doesn't look good on me. I'm naturally a bit chubby and feel and look better carrying a bit more fat, so that's where I'm heading....pass me the ice cream!!!

**Take home message** - There is so much bullshit in the media regarding 'special' fat loss diets and 'fat burning' training which just isn't necessary. The truth is that simple works and, if done consistently, it works bloody well. Unfortunately, in a world of gimmicks, simple doesn't sell and advocating such certainly won't make anyone rich. As such we've ended up with an over confused industry of 'experts' trying to baffle brains with pseudo-science and flash regimes that leaves everyone else chasing their tails, flitting from one latest fad to the next trying to reach their goals yet going nowhere fast.

Don't let anyone convince you or even convince yourself that you are a special case; that you're different and need a 'magic' diet and training regime. I can't emphasise this enough.....ALL YOU NEED IS CONSISTENCY!!!!

The price of getting lean? – Taking body fat levels below a point at which the body is happy to sit doesn't come without some detriment. Besides the awkwardness of people not recognising you or those that do telling you that you look ill, there is a notable decline in performance.

Personally the balance between leanness and performance lies at around 15% body fat; not far from where I started the 12 weeks. Once below this, even with the best attempts to minimise lean muscle wastage, a decline in performance becomes notable, significantly so once into single figures. The table below outlines this on some of the main lifts that I tested during the process:

1 RM	Body Fat	Approx 15% 12/04/2015	Approx 11% 22/05/2015	Approx 7% 01/07/2015	Approx 7% - Dried Out 04/07/2015
Squat		200kg	190kg (-5%)	170kg (-15%)	155kg (-22.5%)
Deadlift		280kg	270kg (-3.6%)	245kg (-12.5%)	215kg (-23.5%)
Bench Press		150kg	142.5kg (-5%)	125kg (-17%)	115kg (-23.5%)
Strict OH Press		100kg	95kg (-5%)	82.5kg (-17.5%)	70kg (-30%)

It is worth noting the massive drop in strength that is seen when in a dehydrated state. Add to this the light headedness, mood swings and difficulty in concentrating and it really highlights the importance of staying hydrated for everyone.

For me this demonstrates that there is a huge misconception that aesthetics and performance go hand in hand. There will be some who will be able to perform at their maximum with very low body fat levels but for the majority of us who aren't genetically gifted this isn't the case and there is a need to decide on what you really want to achieve.