

28 Days to a Leaner You

With the right plan and the right discipline, you can get seriously shredded in just 28 days. You're training hard every day with your program, going heavy on the weights and sweating up a storm with cardio. Newsflash: While that's critical to your ultimate success, that's just not enough for you to lose the fat you want to.

To reach your get-lean goal, you must also follow a get-lean diet. Why? Even if you work out hard for an hour every day, that still leaves 23 more hours for you to wreck all your hard work in the gym with just one slip-up: a measly handful of chips, a beer with the guys or a burger at lunch. Diet is a huge, so to speak, part of the fat-loss equation. It's the backbone of your entire plan, the foundation of a hard body.

Nutrition consultant and bodybuilding expert Jim Juge says nutrition determines your success or failure, plain and simple. "The diet is 65% of what you need to get in shape," he says. Juge would know, as he's helped countless dedicated people reach their goals, from achieving their best body ever to placing first in bodybuilding competitions.

You've got 28 days to get to your goal, so we've recruited Juge to help you every step of the way. He's adapted a traditional bodybuilding competitor's diet for a non-competitor (that means you!) who wants to look his best, shedding as much fat as possible in a very short time. With just under a month, there's no time to fool around, so commit today! Go to the grocery store and stock up tonight. Come breakfast time tomorrow, follow his plan as strictly as you can and get ready to show off those impressive muscles in a month.

Your Get-Lean Principles

Strict. Strict. Strict. This is your mantra for the next 28 days. There's just no way around the diet, says Juge, and eating clean is the name of this get-lean game. Juge's diet plan is filled with fresh, clean foods that are as unprocessed as possible. Here are his three simple principles to shed fat fast.

1. Eat at least 1 gram of protein per pound of bodyweight, daily. If your protein intake is too low on a restricted-calorie diet, you'll lose a lot of muscle in addition to any fat you're lucky enough to shed. A high protein intake will help you preserve lean mass during your dieting phase. Choose lean high-quality proteins like egg whites, poultry, lean red meat and protein supplements. The diet provided here contains about 220-250 grams of protein daily, fine for a male weighing 200-250 pounds. Up your protein only if you're heavier than 250 pounds, or you're very hungry and need to add food during the day. Juge suggests an additional protein shake for an easy quick fix. (If you're under 180 pounds, cut out 3 ounces of meat or chicken per day from the diet.)
2. Keep your carbohydrates low to moderate when trying to lose weight. "On a low day you'll have closer to 100 grams of carbs," he says. "A moderate day is about 150 grams of carbs." Juge prefers to rotate low and moderate days in order to keep energy high and provide a change of pace. Good, clean, fiber-rich carbs include oats, potatoes, rice and whole-grain bread.
3. Drink at least a gallon of water per day. It'll keep you hydrated and healthy. Water should be your primary beverage during dieting. Though many rely on diet sodas, Crystal Light and other low-calorie sweetened drinks, plain old water is really your best bet.

How to Stay on Track

Habits and cravings are the devil when it comes to dieting. Let's deal with habits first. Juge explains that it takes a good week or two to ease into dieting. "Fast food is so easy and there's a McDonald's on every corner. The hardest thing is to develop the new habit of preparing your meals and taking them with you." The first week is

the most difficult, so prepare yourself for some challenges as you abandon your usual routine. For example, you might usually go out for a sub sandwich or burger at lunch. You'll now have to bring your food with you and resist the temptation of spicing up your meal with the Doritos in the vending machine or your usual can of Coke. It can be a real mental battle to stick to your food plan.

To stay motivated and deal with cravings, Juge has a couple of great recommendations. First, schedule a cheat meal on every seventh day. "Many of my clients have their cheat meal on Sunday, so then they're ready for Monday and the week to come," he says. If you feel deprived during the week, concentrate on the cheat meal to come, knowing you can eat absolutely anything you want to – pizza, lasagna, doughnuts, beer, chips, you name it! Remember, though, it's just one cheat meal, not an entire day of cheating. Afterward, get right back on the wagon with your next scheduled meal.

Second, take a few photos of yourself to keep your motivation up. "Most of the people who come to me are doing it for a reason," he explains. "They're going on vacation, competing in a bodybuilding show, or maybe going to a reunion. I always have them strive for that goal. I take front, side and back pictures of them at the beginning and have them post the photos on their mirror at home. I tell them, just keep looking at that picture and think of what you're going to look like in a few weeks."

When it comes to cravings, protein drinks and bars may also help cure your need for sugar, says Juge. He recommends mixing a flavored protein powder in a blender with as much ice as possible, so it'll taste more like a milkshake. Day Five's protein shake includes a cup of berries, which will also help with sugar cravings. Once or twice per week, Juge adds, you can have a low-sugar high-protein bar. The newest varieties taste more like candy bars, with state-of-the-art sweetening techniques.

Your habits and cravings may both rear their heads at restaurants, where it's easy to blow your diet in seconds. To stick to the plan, says Juge, be diligent in ordering. "Ask them to grill your meat without oil or grease. Ask for steamed vegetables with no butter. Get a salad (no cheese) with either fat-free dressing or a vinaigrette." After his 14 years in bodybuilding, Juge testifies that he's found many restaurants are accommodating, so there's no reason to avoid them as long as they'll cook to your preferences.

What to Expect

Some men can lose up to 5 pounds per week, says Juge, if they follow the diet strictly. He recommends striving for a weekly 2 or 3 pound loss for more lasting effects. "That way it's not such a drastic change and you'll be less likely to put all the weight back on when the diet's done," he adds. Weigh yourself naked just once per week, at the same time, preferably on the same scale. That way it'll be as accurate as possible.

If you haven't lost any weight after the first week, it may be time to troubleshoot. In addition to following an exercise program, Juge's first line of defense is upping your cardio. Instead of one cardio session per day, he recommends doing 45 minutes of cardio in the morning, on an empty stomach. Then add a second thirty-minute session in the late afternoon or evening.

If that doesn't stimulate weight loss, Juge's second line of defense is to cut carbs slightly. On lower days, drop to 60 to 80 grams a day rather than 100. Eat this low-carb diet for two days, then insert one higher-carb day (150 grams).

Think of your nutritional plan as the anchor to stabilize all of your other efforts. Eating right will help you shed fat, increase your energy and definitely look the way you want to. Follow this get-lean plan faithfully, and you'll be showing off your new, leaner body in less than a month.

3 Favorite Diet Foods

Here are Juge's picks for the top three foods to turn to when you're trying to shed fat.

Egg Whites - There's no fat or cholesterol and they're pure protein. They're very easy to prepare, taking less than a couple of minutes to make on average.

Oatmeal - It's low in sugar, high in fiber and provides sustained energy. Choose the old-fashioned variety if you have a few minutes to spare, and the 1-minute oats if you're in a rush. In a pinch, you can even rip open a packet of instant oatmeal (plain flavor only) – just add hot water and stir.

Green Veggies - They're healthy and deliver many benefits, like fiber for improved digestion. They contain many valuable vitamins, phytochemicals and antioxidants for better health. Plus, they're bulky and fill you up for just a few grams of carbs per cup of veggies. (*Quick tip:* To quickly steam veggies, put an inch or two of water in a bowl, add veggies, cover bowl and microwave for 2 – 3 minutes.)

Maintain Your Gains

Your 28 days are up – you look great and want to keep it that way. Juge has an easy plan to maintain your body, yet enjoy greater flexibility with your diet. Number one, he says, is to eat a good, clean breakfast. If you're at home, it's much easier to do – just scramble a few egg whites and have a whole-grain item (whole-wheat bread or a bagel, for instance) and/or some fruit. Eat dinner at home, again a healthy clean meal consisting of a lean protein source, green vegetable and whole grains. Then, bring a protein shake or bar with you to work for a midday meal. “You've now got three clean meals taken care of,” says Juge. So if you're eating at a restaurant at lunch and you want to have something different, you can have it. Just keep the rest of your meals pretty strict, without added sugars and fats.