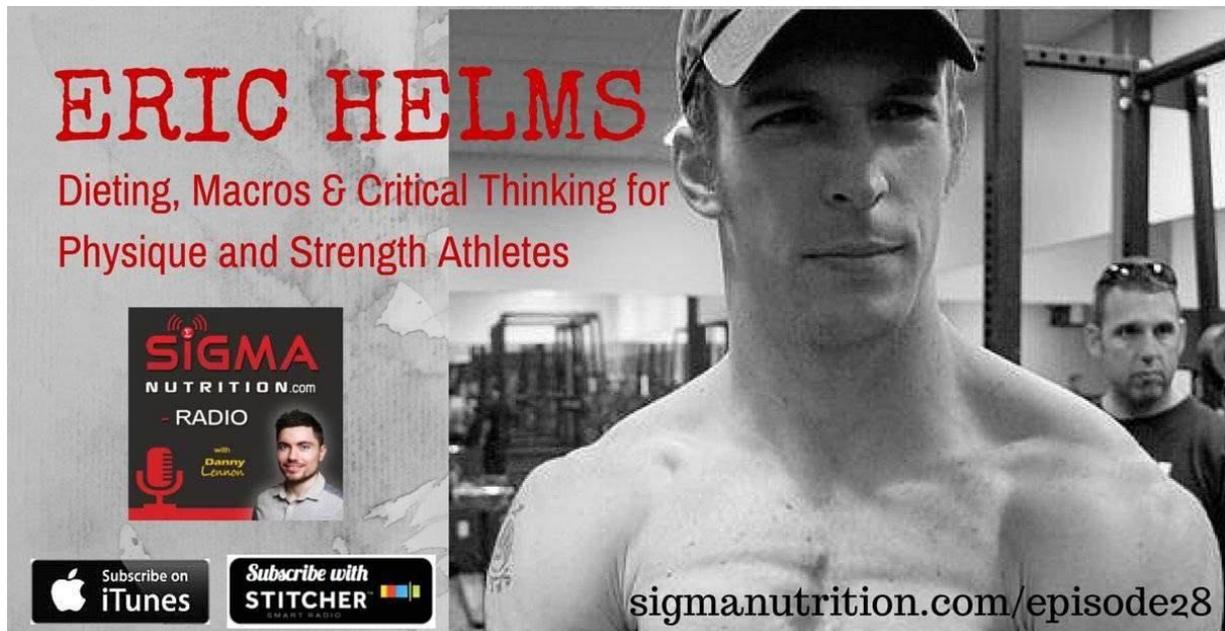


Sigma Nutrition Radio - Episode 28



Danny Lennon (DL):

Hey, guys. Welcome to another episode of Sigma Nutrition Radio. And today, I'm being joined by Mr. Eric Helms. Eric is a competitive bodybuilder and powerlifter. He has a couple of Master's Degrees as well as currently doing doctoral research for Strength & Conditioning based PhD at the moment. And in Auckland, Eric's also coached for raw powerlifters, natural bodybuilders, and serious weightlifters from all different areas.

Eric, just glad to say, thanks so much for coming the show and welcome.

Eric Helms (EH):

Well, thank you very much for having me. It's an honor to be here.

DL: Absolutely my pleasure. So before we get into some of the more specific things I want to do and chat to you about today, Eric, perhaps we could dive a bit into your story because I think it's just great to hear about the journey of someone

who has done some of the things that you've done and who's actually actively doing some of the things that we're going to hear about.

So maybe, first, you'd like to just give us a bit more of an introduction into your own background and your journey, who you are, and really what is your mission with, not only your own training and your own academia, but with the people you work with as well.

EH: For sure, for sure. Well, basically, I got interested in picking up heavy things and getting bigger in my t-shirt when I was about 21. I think that was 2004, so roughly ten years ago. I'm 31 now. And I was... Basically, this was a time in my life where I didn't have a lot of direction.

I was enlisted in the Air Force at the time and was going to be soon to be finishing my enlistment, wasn't only sure what I wanted to do. I wasn't going to continue along that career path. And I gone through kind of the end of the difficult relationship and I just turned to lifting weights as a kind of a therapeutic outlet. And I think it started in the relatively unhealthy kind of obsessive way really just kind of expressing some negative emotion through the weights. And eventually, it became something that really kind of turned my life around. It gave me some direction. And as you can tell now, it actually became a career path.

So I feel like I need to give a lot back to just the iron. And that's what I'm trying to do these days. So anyway, a few years later, I moved back to California from where I was stationed with my wife, Barbara, and I had become a full time personal trainer. I was going back to school and I started dieting down for my first bodybuilding season. It was 2007.

That was an amazing experience. And very quickly, I realized that I didn't want to work with your typical personal training client long-term. I wanted to work with competitive powerlifters... raw powerlifters and competitive natural bodybuilders.

So that was something I was pretty passionate about. And I had met a lot of great people along the way.

I had started my education. And over the years, I just kind of kept chipping away at the goals of developing my physique, getting stronger, and learning how to be a better coach. And so I worked as a personal trainer, worked on my education. I eventually got a job teaching at a place called Bryan College, which is essentially a technical college with the program for personal trainers in Sacramento where I used to live. And I was doing that at the same time as competing and finishing my master's degree, the first one I did, and that was probably where things really came together for me as far as I think my understanding and my technical expertise.

And I also won my first natural show, so I got my pro card with the PNBA. And at that point, I had decided, "You what? I think I can take this as far as I can," and I started applying for PhDs and that's where I'm currently at, is at the Auckland University Technology, which is a school in New Zealand, in Auckland that has a great Strength & Conditioning program. It came out here just about two ago and did the second master's degree to qualify me for a PhD because my initial master's didn't have a thesis. And now, I'm doing my PhD in Strength & Conditioning, looking at auto-regulation. And...

So that's kind of my story, but I'd say, what I'm apart of them and what's more important to me is around 2009, myself and natural pros, Alberto Nuñez, Brad Loomis, Jeff Alberts formed 3D Muscle Journey. Which 3D Muscle Journey is basically here to provide a community and a resource to the natural strength or physique athlete and to provide a coaching service. And our mission is to help elevate the sports as a whole, both via practice, trying to bring a more evidence-based approach to it, and also, to revive community support and just recognition to folks who want to do this whole natural bodybuilding thing.

DL: Awesome. That's brilliant, Eric. And that's exactly what I think I want to dive into throughout the course of this podcast and essentially what those types of or those specific groups of people can benefit from because I think there is, as I'm sure you're aware, a lot of bad information out there. So it's great to have people who are able to provide the level of stuff that I know you guys are putting out.

But first, before we get into that, I'm hoping that I can just do one more kind of bit more personal question because I think really some of the stuff you there mentioned makes a lot of sense. Because I think the outset, if people look at what you're kind of doing now, and the success over the coaching and the career and really everything that's going on. I think when you mentioned there that you kind of were able to come through some stuff and that this almost way of life has allowed you to do that, I think it kind of is almost inspiring and kind of can become cliché. But I think that is the word for people.

Could you maybe just mention what do you think has been, not the biggest struggle, maybe the biggest challenge would be a better word that you have faced or maybe are still facing over the course of either training or competing or career or nutrition or whatever it's been that you think that facing that challenge has got you to kind of where you are?

EH: For sure. That's a good question. And, first, I just want to say it's a humbling thought to see myself as an inspiration. But I can definitely, sure. I think that the struggles we go through in life are typically what makes us the men or women we want to be if we face them with integrity.

But to answer your question, in my 2009 competitive season, about a month or two into it, my father died suddenly. And that was probably one of the hardest things that I had dealt with in my life at the time. And then that season just kind of turned me into this successive series of getting punched the face by life to put it... not to put it nicely. I incurred a hamstring tear that was not requiring surgery

but it was large injury that I had at that point, and I'm still with the largest injury that I have today.

The place I was working went through a number of management changes so there was a period where I didn't know if I'd be able to continue as a personal trainer and this was at the time where 3D Muscle Journey was not in a financial place to support me that it was just in its kind of first stages and we just bought a new home. And then immediately after that, one of my uncles was diagnosed with cancer. And that season, it just kind of seemed like 2009, it was a year where I could have easily delved into personal pity and depression and basically, got steamed rolled over my life and maybe looked up five years later and gone or maybe actually get back into being me.

But I think it was a blessing and that it happened during my contest prep because I had structure, I had something to focus on, and I had a way of kind of processing all of that emotion and psychological trauma in a kind of... in an environment where I had some kind of stable footing. And I didn't quit. Perhaps I went on to compete once in powerlifting and five times in bodybuilding, and it was the first time I had gotten into truly elite levels of leanness and condition. And I had the support of a lot of great friends. I think Alberto was at my house, almost every weekend towards the end of my prep.

So I really learned that if I lean on my support network and those who care about me and if I stick to my goals and deal with my emotions, but in a way that is it all too much it wants that I can overcome anything, and I would say that when I looked back on that season and that I had completed that and really it was just kind of a metaphor for dealing with the death of my father and my family and all that stress that I... I was like, "Oh, wow! I can overcome anything," and maybe it is cliché. But it very much resonates with that whole Rocky speech where it's not about how hard you can hit but how hard you can get hit and still get up. So I found that to be very true for my life at least.

DL: Yes, that's amazing, and thanks for sharing that, Eric. And I think one of the things that just came to me as you were saying that is as opposed as another thing that highlights just the importance for a lot of people of having like a good quality gym that they're in where it's more of that community or network of people that you're talking about, it's that structure there in place and that it gives so much beyond just the actual training aspect of it *per se*.

EH: I would agree. I think one thing that I have from bodybuilding that people probably don't realize is, it brings people together who would never normally be friends. Like myself, Brad, Jeff, and Alberto; we have a lot of things in common in our personality, but we come from very different backgrounds and it's so very cool that we are brothers basically. And we have a lot of people like that in our community. And that can be a very...

You can generate a lot of community support in that whole saying. It takes to village. I think it's very true and it's ironic because it's in a sport that it seemed that's kind of an individual kind of one-man sport or a one-woman sport. And I think when done right, it should definitely be one we have a lot of community support and that can come from the gym environment, yes.

DL: Yes, absolutely. I think when we're talking about people who are strength trainees and strength athletes, powerlifters, physique competitors, and so on, certainly, what I see and I'm sure you see as well that there's a huge variation in the knowledge base of some guys and the appreciation of nutrition as a science within those groups. Some can have fantastic, deep knowledge. Some are doing things that you don't know where they're getting their recommendations from.

So before we get into some more of the specifics later on, perhaps we can frame things with, if you could just give us a kind of an overview of your, I suppose,

philosophy of nutrition. Or simply just a few key fundamentals that such trainees should be paying attention to or should at least have in mind, as a fundamental part.

EH: For sure, and I'll start a little bit broad and then I'll kind of bring it in. I would say that the thing I typically tried to do, if anyone has asked me a question on Facebook or through an email or in person, they normally get a bit of around about the answer. And whether they realize it or not what I'm trying to do is in gender and the person's some critical thinking because I don't want them to just not take the word of whoever they're listening to before and go, "Okay. Eric comes as a new guru. I'm going to use his rules." What I want them to do is, actually question the underlying like a rationale of what they're doing and what they think they need to do.

So when someone asked me about insulin, for example, and they may have a misconception about it, I don't just tell them, "No, insulin doesn't do that," or, "Insulin does this," or, "Insulin is or isn't important." I ask them, "So what is it you think insulin does, and where you heard that? Did you ever go back and check that and some kind of reputable source?"

And I always encourage people to try to look to the roots of things instead of taking things for granted. So really kind of question the foundation of information. I don't think everyone needs to become a nutritional scientist to body build. But I do think it's very important to develop a basic critical thinking skill and to know at least where to find confirmation or information understanding like the basics of how to use a Google Scholar or PubMed, or maybe signing up for a professional who writes a research review like Alan Aragon or something like that. That's step one.

Step two, I did a nutritional pyramid series on YouTube and I kind of went through what I would say, or kind of the funnels of what is important down to the

minutiae from the big picture stuff. And your calorie intake, your energy balance is probably the big thing you want to know. So you get an idea of what rate of weight gain or weight loss or how to maintain your weight, whatever your goal might be, and that just comes from tracking body weight and calorie intake and kind of seeing the relationship overtime, and then funnelling it down to where did [ph] [0:15:46.8] those calories come from, the macronutrients, which I think has gained a lot of awareness and popularity through the, what they called if it fits your macros movement kind of... or that's the big picture stuff in talking about it and understanding what the basic functions of the three different macronutrients are in your body.

And then from there into the micronutrients, meal timing frequency and then peri-workout nutrition and then down into supplementation. If those are understood and in at least a general kind or fundamental way, then one can assess information now that comes in and, assess this does makes sense. Does this kind of go against the paradigm of importance? Is this someone putting the proverbial cart before the horse or they're overstating something, and I think that gives an athlete the ability to at least to assess whether or not someone's feeding them BS or not, or maybe not even intentional. Just that they maybe a little bit misguided in the recommendations because I don't think everyone is purposely giving out misinformation. I do think there's come confusing information out there.

DL: I think one big thing related to that is it, we tend to, well I suppose it's a by-product of people nowadays needing information quick and instantly and needing in such a short form that if it's anything more than a one-minute video or a quick end, so you can send back in the one line, people are kind of disregarding it and looking for something quicker. So it's kind of missing the background context they need to understand what someone is saying so they'll hear one piece of advice given but not understanding who that's giving forward. Do you tend to see that jump up off and for those people that are coming with questions to you, that

they may have heard something but it's they are taking it beyond the context that was mentioned in?

EH: Yes. I think people take information out of context very frequently. And I think this is both a... I think the onus of this goes both on the people delivering messages and on those receiving them. Because I take great pains to make sure that what I say is what I mean. And I think anyone who decides to be a relatively public figure in their niche community of whatever, whether it's combat athletes, strength athletes, bodybuilders. If you're trying to give out information, it's really important to make sure you pay attention to context.

I think it is very easy, very popular, and very saleable and maybe less saleable these days because I'm seeing a kind of a shift in the industry, to give out these kind of sound bites like top 10 best foods for fat loss or five rules you must follow to get shredded or whatever. And most simply don't exist. There aren't best foods in our rules. There are just things that happened and then the contest required to know how to manipulate them in a favorable way.

So I try to always strike that balance of being concise, not overly descriptive of the complex biochemistry, which doesn't really help anyone in most cases, and also providing context so the people will understand when and why not it's important, who I might work for, who it might not, when and what not, and that's a difficult balance to strike.

And then the onus on person listening is they have to be out of the mindset of "I want to quick fix." I think the people who are interested in making fitness a lifestyle or whether they are competitive bodybuilder or just the guy who decides that he wants to get abs for the first time in his life, if that's something they want to commit to, they have to at least step outside of the idea that there are quick fixes. And that means not taking physical or mental shortcuts any more than necessary like I have no problem with heuristics and trying to understand things

as a relatively simple way. And like I said, I don't think everyone needs to become an expert. But they have to get outside of the idea that there is a quick answer to things. And there's only as quick as they can be answers really.

So I think it's very important for both of the receiver and the sender to be aware of the context, and yes, I see that all the time or they're not.

DL: Yes. I would just... as you said, that was... it kind of made me think back to when people are looking for like an initial one-off plan where can I buy a book that's going to tell me exactly what I need to do and then, now, it's going to give me all the answers I need, is like there's just so many variables that each person will have to take into account, that there's no way you can like go on and calculate numbers based off a website and then find out what's going to work perfectly for you. Whereas that's where you kind of need to have that critical thinking and be able to track what you're doing and then change and adjust as you're going along and then make those changes. Whereas, just like you said, people are trying to jump the gun, want the information now, and then once they start doing that, that should be give them everything they're looking for.

EH: 100%, yes, I say it a lot that the... even if you were someone who has read the entire breadth of physiology, nutrition, and then actually a science literature and understands it, you can only really use that science to kind of paint the broad brush of kind of starting off.

You make sure your macro is following to meet simple guidelines. You have appropriate timeframe to get into the shape you need and the calorie intake could get you there over that time period. You set up a solid training plan. You do a few of the things and you make some smart supplements choices. And then when you hit a bump in the road, then you just have to kind of use your critical thinking. There's no scientific guide to every step of your fat loss journey, or whatever your journey exactly is. It's an art once it comes down to the individual

and it's... you can use science to talk about the broad brush strokes, but all of detail work is much more of a logical art than anything else.

DL: Completely agree. And just while we have mentioned energy intake and macros, before we move on, I better ask because I know someone will complain if I don't. What are the, or are there, general guideline numbers that you go by when initially setting out a plan, say, for a new client that is a typical strength trainee that are coming. Are there numbers people can go away and give themselves some sort of baseline with in terms of their macros and calorie intake?

EH: I would say so, yes. And I'll start, since we talked about context, with the context, so this is someone who is metabolically healthy, relatively young, and looking to start a "bodybuilding journey."

Typically the way that I set things up is I have someone just track their intake without necessarily adjusting it, their calorie intake and their food for a couple of weeks. While tracking concurrently their daily weight ins and then getting an average weight just by taking their seven days of the week and averaging it and weighing in under the same conditions, so we can get an idea of the relationship between their energy intake and their weight. Now, this gives me an idea of where roughly their maintenance is.

And then from there, if they're trying to gain weight or lose weight, and I can set an appropriate calorie surplus or deficit. And if we go with the whole philosophy of roughly a 500-calorie per day, deficit or surplus will create roughly a half kg or one pound gain per week, then you can get an idea of how to set your calorie intake.

Typically, for a new person, if they are trying to gain weight, I would say two to three pounds per month that's probably about as fast as I'd want to go, is that it gives you an idea of where to start your calories. And for losing weight, losing

about 0.5 to 1% of your body weight per week is normally the kind of range where you don't run into issues with loss of performance, risking too much lean, muscle mass loss, or kind of accelerating the metabolic adaptations that you want to avoid from a diet. And then from there, we start setting the macronutrients within those guidelines. I like to use other range of like that 1.8 to 2.8 grams per kg. And if you use kind of that lower half, say, 1.8 to 2.3 for someone who's trying to gain weight, not in a deficit. And you use the upper half 2.3 or 2.4 to 2.8 for someone trying to cut and lose weight. That's roughly the kind of the protein guidelines I go by.

And after that, somewhere between 15 to 35% of calories from fat, it's kind of dependent on the person's background, the preference, and where that would put their carbohydrate level intake at. And then after set fat, the rest go to carbohydrates. That's a rough way to do it.

DL: Nice. Nice. And with that, do you tried to keep, most guys to keep a consistent daily intake or will that fluctuate depending on what training days they have or what days they want to emphasize or anything to that, or is it just to try and keep them to those kind of levels?

EH: Good question. So if they are kind of the question of, do I use carb cycling or high and low days for on and off day, etcetera. I like to keep things as simple as possible because I find that enhances adherence but not so simple that we're missing out on some type of benefit.

So what that means is, a big part of this is the individual's kind of behavior and the way their social life and the way they interact with foods. Sometimes in the off season, even though I don't do this because I think it's optimal or anything like that, I allow some more to have one or two high days or even just the weekend that having a higher intake because socially, that's just what works.

So we get a little more of a surplus from the weekend than days in a week. But in general, if that's not an occurrence in that person's life, I will keep the intake roughly the same overall seven days.

If they're dieting and they're not very overweight, normally, I'll use a once per week diet maintenance as a "refeed". And so they'll have... basically, their deficit will come from six low days and they'll have one day roughly at maintenance that will be semi-carb dominant to try to maximize all the theoretical benefits of a refeed.

DL: So you're bumping calories and carbohydrates on that refeed day?

EH: That's right. Yes.

DL: Yes, good. Nice. And so, Eric, one that you talk about one thing related to being a hypocaloric state or being in a calorie deficit, it's a typical concern or a question I get from a lot of strength trainees and particularly powerlifters, who are looking to optimize performance at the same time. And it's this kind of same old issue they have of trying to get leaner but at the same time maintaining or even sometimes improving their performance in the gym or improving their strength. And up to what point is this actually possible? And how should they... is there any difference in how they should structure things if they're trying to get leaner but also want to pay attention to strength and performance?

EH: That's a great question. And I think... There's a couple of different angles I want to attack it from. One is big picture diet side of it and kind of what you should be gauging your success on this by, and that is really important to make sure you're losing too fast, that .5 to 1% kind of max rate of weight loss. I find this pretty critical to making sure that things don't fall off in the gym.

And then actually knowing whether you're getting weak or not. So I think if you're dropping, let's say, from 93kg to 83kg, and your total goes down in that process, your three lift powerlifting total. If it goes down by, let's say, 10kg, that's actually stronger. Your Wilks score is going up. You'd be a more competitive 83kg guy doing 590 total than you would be a 93kg guy doing a 600 total, for example.

Typically, what I do with powerlifters is we track Wilks score, which is the coefficient you use to determine relative strength to body weight, alongside body weight going down. If Wilks is not going down and body weight is going down or Wilks is going up, then we're doing something right.

Instead of just going, "Oh, my God! I lost 20kg and my bench press is going down 5 pounds," it's kind of like, well, that's probably just because of the range of emotion. You don't have back fat anymore or chest fat. It's actually as it travelled another inch. So there's going to be some invertible loss of some lifts as you lose a significant portion of your body mass.

That said, it is not as extreme as most people think. And it doesn't need to be that crazy and it's going to be less strength loss to less what you have to lose. And the more percentage of that, that's body fat versus body weight.

And I think it gets confusing to folks because when I talk about training, I talk about long-term over a lifter's career. They should be increasing their volume over time. That's how you advance yourself through the stages of being a lifter from beginner to intermediate to advanced. The optimizing your volume, which happens as you get stronger. Three sets at 100kg is less volume than 3 sets at 150kg. Now, it's increasing strength and the volume is interdependent relationship.

However, volume is only something that's going to benefit you if you can recover from it. And when you are dieting, your ability to recover is obviously reduced.

Now, this doesn't mean that right at the start of the cut, you should all of a sudden knockdown your volume. I think rather it needs to be a reactive thing versus a pre-emptive thing. I think at the beginning stages of a cut, when your body fat levels are higher, you're a lot more resilient to some of the downsides of it, the ability to replace the calories from a deficit with stored body fat and higher levels of glycogen, and you just don't feel it as much especially in the gym.

A lot of people say they feel better in the beginning stages of the cut where they're kind of maybe improving some of their insulin sensitivity. They're feeling better about the way they looked in the mirror. They feel lighter. They're eating less. Maybe they're up to do in a little bit of cardio to get some active recovery that type of thing. And I think strength progress for first couple of months of the reasonable cut from a moderate body fat level, there probably shouldn't be any strength loss and there maybe even some gains on some lifts.

But, yes, when you get into the nitty-gritty of it, you may need to reduce volume here and there to make sure that you can actually recover from your training and so that it doesn't negatively affect subsequent days in the gym.

And fortunately, you can maintain strength and size with less volume than you need to advance it as an intermediate or advance lifter. So... and that's I think still a worthwhile proposition even though, yes, you want to increase volume, sometimes acutely, during this two, three, four-month cut, it may need to come down at spots.

So does that answer your question, or is that a little too broad?

DL: No. That was absolutely perfect, Eric. And it just got exactly what I wanted to get into. One kind of related thing on that, I was wondering, did you or do you ever you tweak macros then, say, want someone is in that calorie deficit and as things start to get a bit more challenging training wise?

And to kind of the only reason I'm asking this is I recently had Mike T. Nelson on the show, and he talked about his kind of concept of performance-based fat loss where, at a certain point, when he had people in a caloric deficit, he'd actually get them to start upping their carbohydrate intake while taking down, say, fat, and then even taking down protein intake as well so that you could maximize their carbohydrate intake despite being fairly low in calories, and this allowed them to stay training at a decent enough intensity.

Is that something that people can make use of. In that when they're in that calorie deficit to even take down protein, which kind of goes against a lot of what people have in their mind that protein is the most important whether in a calorie deficit?

EH: Yes, definitely. And I actually agree with what Mike T. is doing there a lot. There's a slightly different approach for, say, a bodybuilder or a powerlifter. And protein, if you kind of look at the research, is a strong stimulus to help you hold on to your muscle mass but it's not as strong as stimulus as your training. So if you definitely think you can get a better performance in the gym with the higher carbohydrate intake, it is kind of worth it to rob Peter to pay Paul to reduce your fat content and even your protein content if that would result in a higher quality of trainer and still allow you to keep that calorie deficit you need.

And, again, context is important here. Maybe this wouldn't be something you would do with the bodybuilder who, the performance, it's really more about getting a volume and heavy enough load to keep your muscle size. There's ways you can manipulate training. Or, even if you're losing a little bit of strength, you won't necessarily lose size. But powerlift doesn't give it... Well, it shouldn't give a craft about how big they are. They should just care about how much of that size is translating into a 1 rep max.

So if we can keep a little more training productivity and higher intensities of higher loads, even if we maybe risk a slight amount of muscle mass, that is definitely worth it for a powerlifter. So, context is important. But certainly, you are allowed to take calories and protein, and I actually do it on a semi-regular basis if I think we're still in a threshold where protein is enough.

I would also say that some of the benefits of protein are related to satiety and just general feeling better, that's kind of a study that I just published from my master's degree. For a short period, we compared about 1.6 gram per kg to 2.8 grams per kg. And in that short two-week window, the difference in strength and the fat free mass were pretty negligible.

But the high protein group felt a lot better and was much more satisfied of their diet and had better energy level. So, some of the benefits of a high protein diet aren't necessarily going to show up in some of the hard data. But they will make it easier for the person to kind of tough out the diet.

So I'll keep protein a little higher than I think is "needed" for their training or their physique just so that I can pull back from it if I need to, at times, that especially if I think the person can hold that mentally. And then give that to carbs or give that to fat or just not give it to anything if I need to create more of a deficit and I don't want to pull from their carbs and fat.

DL: Yes, awesome. I think mentioning, as you prudently pointed out, the difference between obviously the goals of powerlifters and pure strength athletes as opposed to bodybuilders is an important distinction I'd like to just jump in on now because obviously, it's something that can be blurred by like the general person starting out when they're looking for a good quality information.

So obviously, a lot of the nutritionally what they're going to be doing is going to overlap. And in terms of like day-to-day training, there's going to be some

overlap. But obviously, there are clear distinctions for those two groups. What are the kind of key distinctions people should keep in mind on the nutrition sort of thing if there is, those main differences. Like just some of the ones we just mentioned there?

EH: Yes. I would say basically, it comes down to, sure, your general trainee probably wants to be strong and be big and be lean. And it's... once you get to the point where you're actually getting on the platform or getting on the stage and you're a competitive powerlifter or a competitive bodybuilder, one of those goals gets much more elevated. For the bodybuilder, you have to decide, does it make more sense for me to risk some muscle loss, risk some strength loss just to get leaner because that will result in the better competitive physique? When... If you're a general trainee, you'd probably just diet slower. You don't have a date holding you down or you'd realize, "You know what? Maybe it's not reasonable for me to get to 8% body fat at all, I'll just stop at 10% because I can't sustain it."

Well, for the bodybuilder, you've got to get on stage with as little subcutaneous body fat as possible and sometimes even with some muscle loss, that results in a higher placing. It depends. Sometimes it's not worth it. You don't want to lose that full lessons. So it's always this kind of context specific judgment call that you have to make when you get to one of this kind cross road of having to rob Peter to pay Paul.

And for the powerlifter, when you are at that point where you know making your weight class is maybe going to risk performance loss. It's going to make diet hard. And you can kind of have to decide, "Well, do I want to stop this diet and maybe try to push myself on a day off to maybe be slightly more dehydrated or maybe delay my meal or do something in the final week where I have less sodium to try to manipulate my weight. What do I think is going to affect my performance more, being low in sodium, low in carbohydrate, and a little dehydrated even after my two-hour weigh-in, if I have enough time to rehydrate?"

Or, is it going to be losing another true two pounds of body mass here four weeks out from my meet?

It always comes down to kind of going back to that context specific, artistic, intuitive kind of logical judgment call when you have to make as an athlete or as a coach on what is going to be the least amount of harm really, and hopefully result in the best performance for that person.

That is kind of the art of coaching and it will result in different nutrition adjustments. For example, when I'm working with the powerlifter, yes, I'm watching the scale. I want them to make weight. But if... All of a sudden, the trainings in the toilet, I'm probably going to do something. And if I have the time, I'm going to slow down the weight loss and I'm going to try different macronutrient combination. I'm going to try to adjust their training in some way that split it up to get more recovery.

But with the bodybuilder, if their trainings in the toilet and they're looking good and they're looking better, I kind of to say, "Well, buddy, do the best you can in the gym and we'll make some changes as we can." But if things are looking right, and every week, they're getting leaner and they're maintaining fullness, I'm not going to probably change the equation even though their bench press may drop 20 pounds.

DL: Yes, sure. Awesome. Now, another topic I want to talk with you, Eric, and I'd love to hear your thoughts on this. I actually have Doctor Abbie Smith-Ryan coming on the podcast soon. And I know as I'm sure you're aware she did a paper recently, a great paper with Layne Norton, and she's talking about this and concept of metabolic adaptation, which is kind of almost exploded in terms of people's awareness of it at least recently. And one kind of, I suppose, issue related to that has been specifically reversed diet, and this is I think one of the big missing points for a lot of guys.

So, first, maybe before we get into that, we should qualify exactly what we mean by reversed dieting. And then maybe you can mention why it should be considered, and then who needs to actually pay attention most to it.

EH: Sure. So, first, yes, I think the topic in metabolic adaptation is a very cool one. And I've been very intrigued by it ever since Lyle McDonald started writing about it in the early 2000's or even earlier. And it's just the concept that as you diet or manipulate your intake, that affects your output. So that it's not simply an equation where you have an energy intake on one side and energy output on the other and they're separate. But rather, either side of the equation affects the other one.

And if you were to increase your caloric expenditure in a free living state, you probably eat more. And if you were to decrease your caloric intake, that can reduce your caloric output, both from a behavioral and a physiological standpoint.

So therefore, if one is to go through a long strenuous diet and get down to essential body fat levels like you would see in a bodybuilding competitor, you're going to be at the end of it behaviorally and psycho-socially pushed to want to eat a lot more. Basically, you're not going to have any satiety signals and you're going to be very, very hungry and physiologically, you will have down regulated to whatever degree your body can, your energy output. So it's... that combination. You're easily able to store fat and gain weight and you are very interested in eating.

So the concept of reversed dieting is that we try to prevent a series of vengeance after the show, which is very, very common, that often results in depression and a lot of stress and really just the dissipation of a physique that someone may have worked six months to develop in a matter of weeks, and that could be devastating the person. And it can also create kind of these binge-perge cycles.

And when I say perge, that doesn't necessarily mean throwing up. But it could be massive amounts of cardio, or it could be these kind of minicut, mini-bulk binge cycles that continue and basically waste the person's off season. And that is the whole rationale why we use a "reverse diet". Or it's just a measured and controlled way of reintroducing a higher food intake and reducing the cardio levels not to try to avoid some of those primarily psychological pitfalls.

DL: Could you maybe go through a case study example, perhaps just to show how you've used reversed dieting with someone before and what that might practically look like to someone?

EH: For sure. The first step is when someone is, say, 4, 6, 2, or 3 weeks out, we have a good chat about, "Hey, what are we going to do after the show?" It's very easy as a coach or a competitor to get hyper focused on the dates where the persons can be posing on stage. And unfortunately, that can leave someone with their pants down the day after the show. And with the lack of a plan, a person who is physiologically hungry and very, very food-focused and is no longer handcuffed to getting on stage and speedo is going to eat a lot of food.

So it starts with really, really careful planning on the frontend. And just kind of making the person aware and especially if they're a first-time competitor of what the potential downsides are and risks and what could happen.

I'm not trying to scare the person, but I just want them to be aware of the reality. For example, my very, very first season, the only plan I had was a list of restaurants I wanted to hit, which went terribly. And I put on literally 22kg in two months after my first season. I went from probably 7% body fat to 20 something percent body fat very quickly. And I felt terrible and I spent the next year in this on and off cutting state. So yes, but that's probably a case study of how not to do it.

So typically, what it should look like is you have this conversation with the person and this conversation should primarily be about the process, the behavior, and experience of it not trying to explain to them some leptin-ghrelin relationship and growing relationship or anything like that, and just letting know what it's going to feel like, what they might go through and then letting him know that, "Hey, you're probably going to binge. But if we can be 80% on point with our reverse diet, then we're going to do great."

And basically, the idea is you want to get them as fast as possible for the person, which is a huge caveat back into a reasonable calorie intake and energy expenditure for them, everyone being different, without, them getting mentally stressed by it.

Alan Aragon wrote a really good piece in one of his AARR series. If you're not a subscriber to that, I recommend it, where he talked about kind of the ideal reverse diet, and I say that is an ideal reverse diet when you don't have to take into account kind of the psychology of the person.

And basically, he said, "Hey, you want to do this as fast as possible, and you want to get them up to as high level of calorie intake as possible. You want to... so what if they gain a little bit of body fat? If they can get up to from 5% to 11% or 12%, a six-week period, that's fine. That's a good off season body fat, then they can slow it down, and I agree with that in theory and in principle.

However, some people really have a tough time. And in two months, in going up 5% or 6% body fat, and that can be a very mentally devastating. So you kind of have to play it by ear with each person.

The typical way I start out with it is we make a large jump initially. I want to get him out of the deficit. And if I haven't already been able to increase the calories

into the show, which is a luxury when someone is lean early, which you try to do it but it does not always work out, then that jump is obviously larger if they're kind of rock bottom with their intake.

A good kind of rule of thumb is going back to probably where you start of the diet, which maybe 300 to 600 calories higher. But if you're in a 300 to 600-calorie deficit, that's not a huge deal, and then kind of holding there until weight gain stops. And if weight gain doesn't even start and you maintain or lose, then we're talking about making somewhere between, say, 60 to 100-calorie jumps on a weekly basis so long as you're not outpacing the rate of weight gain that you've decided is acceptable while concurrently dropping off a cardio session here and there.

I like to get someone within two to three months back up to a very, very reasonable intake and even sooner if possible. But I think one thing people to keep in mind is that, generally, people develop some of these kind of OCD and neurotic behaviors around food in the course of a contest prep diet. And it's kind of funny. We laugh about it as body builders, looking back on how we track down the one grain of rice that fell off the scale or we started tracking your Splenda or things like that that seem asinine in the off season. But those are there because the contest prep process and truly being in a semi starved state is a psychological stressor. And one of the ways that we deal with that is by creating this kind of behavioral rules. And what some might look at and say, "These are unnecessary kind of neurotic behaviors," but they're there for a reason. That's stress management.

Now, that said, they can get to the point where these coping strategies are actually stressful in of themselves and you want to manage that during prep, getting someone to not eat exactly on hour, re-hour, or to not just only at the same foods or whatever. And as a coach, you want to keep an eye on these things. And as a competitor, you want to be aware of when you start doing funky

things that don't really make sense logically. If they're making your life harder, trying to discard them.

But anyway, so you develop these behaviors, and the typical thing to do is just to let go of all of them immediately once the show is done with, and that can create this really big sense of the abyss.

So I think it's important to not only gradually increase your food and gradually decrease your cardio, but to gradually let go of some of these behaviors like I normally tell somebody, "Okay. Hey, let's stop tracking the stuff that doesn't matter. Don't cap your diet, so as don't track your Splenda. If a grain of rice fell off the scale, great. Don't wait the individual slices a bread. Just take the packages word for it this week, that kind of thing.

And then from there, maybe three weeks later, we go, "Hey, let's have one meal out per week. I want you to go to a restaurant, take your significant others. Start rebuilding that relationship that may have suffered. And track the food but don't weigh it, and just hope the restaurant is right. And if it's not, don't worry about it." And then, slowly kind of just relaxing all of those restrictions that may have been necessary either psychologically or for the actual competitive outcome as you progress in the off season. And maybe instead of tracking your macros and then plus or minus 5 grams, we get the plus or minus 10 – 15 or 20 grams, that type of thing.

DL: I just want to say, that's brilliant, Eric. I think of haven't really heard anyone at talk as brilliantly about not only reversing the diet but reversing the behaviors. And it just makes so much sense because like we even said at the outset of this whole thing, this is a lifestyle for people. And once you... if you have an event and then suddenly, once it's over, your every behavior you've had for X amount of months, leading up to that is now thrown out the window and you lose all the run of whatever is being going on. Then, like you said, that can have that mental

knock on. And I haven't heard that talked about too much, but yet, it's such an important aspect. I think it's brilliant that you bring it up.

EH: Well, I can't take too much credit for it because it's something that the four of us, at 3D Muscle Journey have learned through personal pitfalls and through wishing with, maybe, I always look back and go, "Man, if my clients from 3 or 4 years ago, if I could just redo that, I'd feel better about it." So, yes, it's one of those things you learned from taking a few hundred people through the same competitive process.

DL: Yes, cool. And before we do start to wrap things up, Eric, obviously, you've had access to a lot of great people that you've been able to learn with and communicate with, I was just wondering, is there any piece of advice that sticks out to you that is, what the best piece of advice maybe you've received that had informed the way you may do something or the advice you give then to people? Is there anything that kind of stands out that you can think of?

EH: Sure, man. And I've been fortunate enough to have a lot of great mentors. And right now, kind of the person that's popping into my mind is my PhD and Master's primary supervisor, Doctor John Cronin. And when I go out on a limb and give a little bit of his personal story, and hopefully, he either doesn't hear or does or doesn't care. But he recently overcame a fight with cancer and this was kind of in the midst of him being a very, very active professor, rising through the ranks, and really doing a lot in the field of Strength and Conditioning.

And he had a very close brush with death to put it straightforward. And he told me when we got out here that it's all about balance. You have to keep yourself healthy and that you got to take care of yourself first before you can help anyone else or really address the things in your life. And if pushing towards personal achievements destroys your life or degrades in your life, then you've kind of got the equation wrong.

The whole reason why we do these things like competition or education or all the other things, all the things that are supposed to enhance our life, if they're not actually doing or intending them, then we need to kind of go back to drawing board. He also said, "Look at your life, and are you putting something positive out into the world? And if you're not, then why are you here? You're making the world a worse place." And he said, "You don't have time to hang around negative people and to be doing these negative things. That's only going to be life destroying and bring disease." So I think just the positive mindset and evaluating what I do on a daily basis, "am I building people up or am I tearing them down?" I think it's been invaluable to me.

DL: Brilliant. But before I wrap up, and, Eric, maybe now is a good time for you just to let people know where they can find you, on your website or social media, or is there anything else that you want to bring people's attention to?

EH: All right, for sure. For sure, yes. So our main static website is www.3Dmusclejourney.com – the number 3, the letter D. That's where you can find information about natural bodybuilding in general. There's a bunch of articles, some motivational videos, stuff all the way getting back to 2009 and a lot of fun stuff there, also, the information on our coaching. If you're not a fan of reading articles and you kind of more like and what Danny was talking about reading or watching the one-minute videos, you can check out our YouTube page, which is, [YouTube/team3DMJ](https://www.youtube.com/team3DMJ). And unfortunately, we don't have a lot of one-minute videos, but we have a fair bit there at least under ten minutes.

And then, for those of you who are really into kind of the academic side of it and the science, I have a profile on Research Gate, which is kind of like as Facebook for researchers and that's just my name after the backslash, after Research Gate, or you can just Google Research Gate Eric Helms and you can find my publications.

DL: Perfect. And for everyone listening, all those links will be in the show notes so you can just head on over to in the show notes for this episode and they'll all be clickable. And I also did on what Eric said earlier about Alan Aragon's Research Review, I definitely recommend the resource and I'll put a link to that in the show notes as well.

Eric, that final question that I always ask in all the guests, and it's probably kind of relate it to what you just talked about maybe in the previous question. But I always like to find out if there is just one thing that you would advise people to do each and every day that would lead to an improvement in, not only their health, but in just in their life in general and this can be related to [?] [0:56:34.5] anything, now, what kind of one thing would you point out to people?

EH: I'm going to kind of go with my previous answers. Ask yourself, "Am I making the world a better place?" And I think this comes down to the... even the small stuff. If you're on Facebook and you're making a post, "Am I making the world a better place?"

DL: That is perfect. I love that so much. Eric, it's been an absolute pleasure to have you on. I'm sure people about massive value from this, some great information and you've linked to some person [ph] [0:57:06.4], a great resources there. So I just want to say thanks so much for coming on the show. It's been a pleasure.

EH: That's been an absolutely honor, Danny. I appreciate you having me.

DL: thanks very much and I'll talk to you again, soon.

EH: All right. Cheers, man. Okay.

DL: So that was Episode 28, tons of information to take away from that one as well as ways to practically apply all of it. Eric is so good at breaking this stuff down. If you want to catch any of the links and resources that myself and Eric talked about in today's show. You can get them at [SigmaNutrition.com/episode 28](https://SigmaNutrition.com/episode28).

So it's just sigmanutrition.com/episode28 and you'll just see a link to pretty much everything we mentioned. Also, what I've included on those show notes is you can download the macronutrient calculator or a spreadsheet that I use with my own clients while working out calorie and macronutrient requirements and you can you download that for free on the show notes page. Let's just go there and click that link that's there.

And, again, it's a great time coming off the back of these podcasts and you can just use Eric's recommendations where he talked about picking protein requirements and then tweaking the macros for the ratio of carbs to fat and so on. So, use all the information you've used in conjunction with that spreadsheet and hopefully, that will be helpful to you.

Next week, we have Doctor Spencer Nadolsky on the show, going to be in absolute monster of an episode, really cannot wait to get this out to you. So, that will be out next week. So, make sure you're subscribed on either iTunes or Stitch or any other app that you're using to make sure you get those shows and you don't miss it. So, Doctor Spencer Nadolsky next week. That's all from me, and I'll talk to you guys soon.