

Looking Tight on that Big Day!

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Most of us would consider ourselves the furthest thing from being truly vain and would perish the thought of having to shield an accusation of being a narcissist. But even the least shallow among us still have occasions that motivate us to particularly want to look our best. Is there a company pool party, family reunion, or first date coming up? How about THE big one: your wedding!? I get asked all of the time how can one manage to look as absolutely perfect as they can on that day. Now, assuming you have lost any weight you want to lose, is there a way to “peak” on that day? Models and actresses want their faces, arms, and abs to look as tight as they can be on the film set or for the photo shoot and we all want to look like them! I’m going to outline what you can do for the entire week prior to an event that will ensure you to lose an extra pound or two, avoid any abdominal bloating, and make your skin as tight as it can be. Hang in there through a little practical metabolic physiology and I’ll guide you in for a soft landing with a perfect plan!

First you have to understand that your body has a “normal” state of water balance and stored carbohydrate (glycogen) levels at whatever percentage of body fat you are. This article won’t deal with the overall losing of body fat for the long-haul, I’ll have plenty of upcoming articles on that (and have published a book), but will help you zero in on your special event. Given the fact that you will probably have been losing some body fat leading up to the week prior, you will have already put yourself in a caloric deficit and will be operating on less carbohydrates than would be ideal in a non-dieting situation.

There is a finite amount of carbohydrates that our bodies store in our muscle tissue, our liver, and in our blood stream. Every gram of glucose retains about three times its weight in water. As you enter a state of calorie and/or carbohydrate depletion, you use up that intermediate energy source from your liver and muscle and there’s less to hold water in your body. You’ve undoubtedly heard how the first big loss you enjoy in a diet is “water loss?” This is the cause. You can lose 5-10 lbs in water, stored carbohydrates, and a little body fat in one week if you’re aggressive.

Most people blame sodium for water retention, but it’s usually the carbs that the sodium rides into our body that causes the water retention, such as tortilla chips, salty snacks, etc. Once you’ve successfully depleted your body of excess stored glycogen (carbs) and then refill with a carb-binge or even with just a bigger day of healthy carbs, you retain all of that water again and feel soft, squishy, even bloated. I know you know what I’m talking about! This isn’t the way you want to look and feel on your big day!

In general, then, you want to be decreasing the amount of carbohydrates you’re consuming as your event approaches, but there are other factors and a way to cycle these variables to make it all work together for the perfect “peak.” First, you have to establish what your food volume will be in all three macronutrient areas: protein, carbohydrates,

and fat. A woman who is relatively active and exercises, I would suggest approximately .75 to 1.0 grams of protein per pound of body weight. If you were 130 pounds, for example, this would be 98 to 130 grams of protein per day.

Fat intake should be low to moderate just to keep calories at a level to allow a deficit but still make room for the more important protein and carbohydrates. I would suggest 15-20% of your overall calories should come from fat. For most dieting women, this would mean 20-30 grams per day. Protein and fat are the variables that stay rather consistent through this final week of preparing your body to be its tightest. I would keep it simple and have some flexibility with protein and fat, but do be fairly consistent; you don't want any wild swings at all this last week.

Carbohydrates are the big variable that you will need to really follow a plan with. Remember, this is what dictates water retention in your body. Just to create a cycle where your body will be shedding excess water at the time you need, we need to start with a slightly higher baseline. Let's say you've been dieting on 100 grams of carbs per day and have been successful at losing body fat. Then we know that level of food is creating a carb/calorie deficit. About five to seven days out from your big day, you need to be at that baseline number. Then, plan your carbohydrates to slowly start decreasing as a final countdown. If you were going to follow a full week of final preparation, I would set your first two days at that stable, baseline level of dieting, then start the carb-lowering march.

The third, fourth, and fifth days, you may go down to 75 grams, and the day before, you may want to cut to 50 grams. Each day, incidentally, includes all carbs: fiber, starch, sugar, "non-impact" carbs, sugar alcohol, etc. Go with total carbohydrates if you're following my example (just as a matter of semantics, we have to be on the same page.) This level of food intake may be too low for some who are already fairly lean and have fast metabolic rates. You may be starting higher, but the pattern is still the same. You have to have a gradual decrease in carbs to really flush excess water out of your body and to make your body look "crisp" and tight. You'll gradually start feeling and looking tighter as you progress into the week and you'll see the weight on the scale drop, reflecting the shedding of subcutaneous water.

If you get too carb depleted, you may feel excessively lethargic, your legs will feel heavy, you'll get very grouchy (just ask your friends), and you'll have mind-blowing cravings and the potential to binge eat. Don't let yourself go that far. You may need to make sure your protein is up where it needs to be, you may need to back off the drop of carbs slightly, or you may need to even increase fat a little. One thing not to worry about is sodium. This has such little impact that it's a non-factor. As a matter of fact, you need a certain amount of sodium to keep water in your muscles and not have muscle cramps. The last variable, nutritionally speaking, is water. **DO NOT** stop drinking water. You should be consuming close to a gallon a day. For those of you who don't drink much water, at least try to get half to three quarters of a gallon per day. Try to greatly reduce or eliminate other liquids like diet soft drinks that can cause dietary reactions, water retention, and skin swelling. Try not to introduce anything that your body isn't used to.

If I went with the scenario I've been building upon; a 130 pound woman who is as lean as she wants to be but wants to look her best on Saturday, here's how the first drop in carbs would look on paper:

BREAKFAST:

| | PROTEIN | CARBS | FAT |
|--------------------------------|---------|-------|-----|
| 1/3 cup (dry measured) oatmeal | 2 | 18 | 1 |
| 1/2 cup skim milk | 4 | 7 | 0 |
| 1/8 cup almonds | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| Cinnamon and Stevia or Splenda | 0 | 0 | 0 |

SNACK:

| | | | |
|------------------------------|----|---|---|
| Ready to drink protein shake | 20 | 2 | 1 |
|------------------------------|----|---|---|

LUNCH:

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----|----|---|
| 3 oz. Chicken breast | 21 | 0 | 3 |
| Low fat/low calorie dressing | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Salad (no bacon, cheese, or croutons) | 0 | 10 | 0 |

SNACK:

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|----|---|
| Fat-free, no sugar added yogurt | 5 | 15 | 0 |
|---------------------------------|---|----|---|

DINNER:

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|----|----|---|
| 4 oz. Chicken breast or fish | 28 | 0 | 4 |
| Low-starch steamed veggie or salad | 0 | 10 | 0 |

SNACK:

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|----|---|
| Rice cake with 1 tsp. Peanut butter | 3 | 10 | 4 |
|-------------------------------------|---|----|---|

| | | | |
|--------|----|----|----|
| TOTAL: | 87 | 78 | 23 |
|--------|----|----|----|

To make another move toward 50 grams of carbs for the final day before the event, you could replace the yogurt with another protein shake, drop the rice cake, and maybe replace the oatmeal breakfast with an egg white omelet. You'll invariably will, and should, increase protein a little as the carbs come down. This will stave off hunger and still keep you on pace. Your day doesn't have to look just like this sample, but at least you have a framework to guide you. I know your big day is very important to you; now you can have the confidence that you will look your best!

