

You Only Get One Peak!

Dear Diary,

Sunday: Look great; I'm ready this year! Started carb depleting, sodium loading, water loading.

Monday: Second day of the same; getting harder.

Tuesday: Last day of carb depleting, everything else the same; freaky hard and vascular.

Wednesday: Started carb loading, water high, cut sodium; huge and vascular, started getting softer in the evening.

Thursday: Second day of carb loading; really watery but huge!

Friday: Last day of carb loading, cut water to half a gallon (to shed subcutaneous water I'm holding) and eliminated sodium; starting to get a little flat and still soft, must need more carbs.

Saturday: @#%&! Lost size – much smaller, not as watery, but very soft and flat. Same thing every year!!

Sound familiar? Let me run through the supposed logic behind the steps you may have blindly followed to your contest doom. Super carb compensation started as an experiment for runners where it was discovered that after three days of eliminating all carbohydrates from your diet, your muscular system would compensate by holding up to 50% more when provided enough carbohydrates. You've experienced it without having to be in a contest situation. A day after a pizza buffet gorge-fest you'll have a mind-blowing pump in any body part you work. Huge! That feeling, you interpreted, would be great on stage. It's what you need to look like, you reason to yourself. But, you may not be as familiar with the fact that when your body has enough glucose to shovel 50% more into your biceps than normal, you'll also have extra glucose floating around the interstitial spaces of your body outside your muscle cells. Water follows carbs. In the off-season, your spare tire may mar the evidence of this added softness, but pre-contest, you'll look and feel like someone injected three gallons of water under your skin. Thus, the two to five pounds of weight gain after a carb binge.

So, you reason that a carb depletion and carb load will leave you huge! Now, how do I make sure I don't get that spill over? Cut water? Sodium load and then deplete? Let's play out the rest of the scenario, my little Iron-Einstein. It all sounds logical; too much water under the skin: let's cut water out. I'll have all the carbs in my muscle, I'll pee out all the subcutaneous water, and I'll end up with Todd Elliot's mass and Dave Goodin's skinless hamstrings definition. The problem starts with the fact that your muscle is up to 75% water and it's the water that makes you full and hard, not the carbs. When you cut the water it starts leaving your body indiscriminately from your

muscle and everywhere else. You now start getting flatter and softer. The overage of carbs you have stored are still in and around your muscle so the remaining water leaves a film hiding your striations and your muscles aren't full enough to push out against their own fascia to create separations. Your striations and separations are gone and you're muscles are flat and squishy. Sorry for those of you experiencing post traumatic stress syndrome from the flashbacks of so accurately reading your past contest experience to this point, but one more "corrective" measure: sodium.

Maybe if I sodium load and then deplete, I'll solve this problem. Maybe that's what pushed the fluid out of my muscle and left me flat. You need up to four times as much sodium than potassium and when you train as hard as you probably do, you need even more. Also, excessive potassium causes water retention just like excessive sodium does. When you make dramatic cuts in your sodium, you no longer have what you need to pump water into the muscle. You may drop more water from your body, most of it from your muscle tissue again, but the only things you gain are cramps that almost tear muscle from bone on stage. So why do people continue to follow a recipe for self-destruction that someone came up with decades ago? "Cause by golly it's gotta work this time! I read it from the 300 pound Mr. Olympia contender in the 500 page annual issue of Beefy Girls in Lingerie Bodybuilding Mag!"

Here's what you can do to finally get it right. It boils down to three integral issues. First, in what state does my body look best? Second, how do I get there? And, third, how do I stay there? I'll explain the first, but how you get there and how you stay there is really dependent on your body type and metabolic rate. That's why I don't just write or sell "programs" to clients; I work with them with massive communication right up to the morning of the show. Recall the diary scenario or even think back to your most recent contest experience. You looked your fullest and hardest BOTH when you were drinking unlimited water and your carbs and calories were in a deficit. Why? Recall that your body is about 65% water and your muscle tissue about 75% water. When you deplete water even slightly, you won't be up to full capacity in what your muscle can hold. Softer, flatter muscle is the result. As if that isn't bad enough, softer, flatter muscle means there isn't as much volume to push out against the fascial constraints of the muscle and you lose muscle separation.

The misunderstanding or misapplication of water dynamics goes hand-in-hand with a total misunderstanding of carbohydrates. Do carbs make you full? Yes and no. It's the water that makes you full, but it's the carbs that attract water into the muscle. Too much carbohydrate, however, will mean glucose is floating around the muscle as well as inside, thus the dreaded spillover. Once you spill over, you can do nothing that won't take days to correct. Once you're soft from extracellular water and glucose you will not recover in time for the contest. If you're slightly flat from not having enough carbs in your muscle tissue, you can remedy that with 30 minutes notice. You only store 350-500 grams of glucose in your entire body, period. It doesn't take three days to carb up. Your body works best absorbing carbs slowly in small increments, though, thus the need for a perfectly timed peak week that leads to a perfect peak on Saturday. For example, after following my very detailed Peak Week spreadsheet I created just for her,

one of my recent title winners was just a little flat the night before and the morning of a show. Being as hard as possible, but a little flat is the best way to err. I simply increased carbs slightly to the already higher carbs scheduled for that Saturday morning, left water and activity plans alone, and by the time her feet hit the prejudging stage, muscle fullness was at capacity! She won the whole show. Water stays high, carbs only as high as necessary.

What about sodium? Who ever said sodium ever causes water retention in people who are unbelievably active and sweating a lot? Who ever said you need to cut sodium out and add truckloads of potassium? Whoever it was is the Stalin of bodybuilding, slaughtering more competitors' hopes on contest day than you can imagine. Nothing will make you flatter and softer than trying to upset this delicate balance of minerals responsible for water balance in your body. Your body reacts much quicker than you do and will wildly fluctuate to compensate for ill-advised mass-scale upset. And, your muscle NEEDS the sodium to retain water.

If I could write a concise statement describing the physiology of peaking it would be just about the exact opposite of what most people do. Conventional wisdom says drop water, try to super-compensate a carb load, and cut sodium. Wrong, wrong, and wrong. There's nothing more rewarding than seeing a frustrated bodybuilder full of potential finally get it right. Be one of those bodybuilders!

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