

All-Navy Sports: Making Weight

Making weight is one of the most difficult challenges for athletes in weight class sports. The thirst, the long hours of working out in sweat suits, not eating for several days before competition, the mental and physical fatigue and a weakened immune system are all just a few of the obstacles a weight class athlete needs to battle with before they even compete. After all that, the competition should be the easy part, right? Despite the danger of some of these behaviors, it seems like too many weight class athletes find it very easy to make the decision to “suck” weight to a lower weight class or for a coach to suggest that you “suck” weight to a lower weight class. Unfortunately the decision should not be taken too lightly and more consideration and planning needs to go into this decision.

First, you need to decide if you’re going to be competitive at a significantly lower weight. Sometimes it is easy to choose a number on a weight chart, but the consequences of losing weight from fat, muscle and water may be more detrimental to your performance than beneficial.

Second, you will want to talk to a medical doctor and sports dietitian to evaluate how to maximize fat loss and minimize muscle and water loss. They will also be able to write out a meal plan, set realistic goals and time your fueling around your workouts.

Next, you will need to decide if you will have the time to train with the necessary intensity each day and the mental and physical resilience to train and compete each day without eating enough calories to support the activity.

The purpose of this article is to help provide a strategy for “making weight” while not sacrificing your performance. One of the most important decisions is to assess what weight class you can *realistically* compete at. Ask yourself if this is a weight that you can reach and perform at for an extended period of time. Making weight at a lower weight class is useless if you’re not able to be competitive at that weight because you miss training sessions due to illness or you have no energy to perform at a high level.

After making the decision to compete at a lower weight class, a good plan is to try to aim for a weight that is within 6% of your competition weight and maintain that weight throughout the entire season. That means using the off season to reduce your weight to within 6% of your competition weight and maintain that weight into the season and throughout it. (See Figure 1). By maintaining a weight so close to competition weight, “making weight” for competition will be easy. It will also offer you an advantage over your opponent since you will be well nourished and well hydrated while they are fatigued. Losing weight in the offseason also allows for you to lose weight gradually. Well planned, gradual weight loss targets fat stores, not muscle or



All-Navy Sports: Making Weight

water like typical weight sucking strategies. In fact, typical “weight-sucking” methods can lead to as much as 50% muscle and water loss!

If you do find yourself needing to lose weight quickly, there may be a strategy that will maximize your fat loss, while minimizing your muscle and water loss. A case study of a professional boxer highlighted in the *International Journal of Sports Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism* showed that the athlete was able to lose 21 lbs. of fat and a small amount of muscle over a 12-week period. He reduced his total body fat percentage from 12% to 7% without decreasing bone mineral density, becoming dehydrated or ill. In fact, he became stronger and it was the first time he was ever able to consume a small amount of food and water the morning before weigh-in. He also did not feel the urge to binge on fatty fried foods before competition.

So what is the recommendation?

1. Assess how much weight you need to lose to compete at the lower weight class.
2. Divide that number by two. If you need to lose 20 pounds, you need to give yourself at least 10 weeks to try to lose that weight. This approach will allow for 2 pounds per week of weight loss.
3. Commit to a balanced strength and conditioning program which trains one to two times per day consisting of cardiovascular exercise such as running in the morning, sport-specific training such as heavy or speed-bag work and some cross training such as swimming, biking, weight lifting or agility drills.
4. Consume enough calories to support your resting metabolic rate or the amount

Figure 1

Lose weight before your season and maintain your weight within 6% of your body weight throughout your entire competitive season.

Desired Weight Class: 152lbs. (69kg)

152 lbs.

$152 \times .06 = 9.1 \text{ lbs.}$

$152 + 9.12 = 161.1 \text{ lbs.}$

A weight class athlete who wants to compete at 152 lbs. should enter the season and maintain 161 lbs. throughout the competitive season.



All-Navy Sports: Making Weight

of calories you need to function at rest. To figure out how many calories you burn at rest, go to the website in Figure 2 and plug your information into the calculator or you can manually calculate your resting metabolic rate with the Cunningham Formula by following the example in Figure 3.

5. Accurately plan what you eat and when you eat it. Seeking the assistance of a sports dietitian would be ideal, but you can also go to the link in Figure 2 to use the Navy Fitness Virtual Meal Builder to plan the perfect mix of nutrition for optimal performance.

Figure 2

To assess your resting metabolic rate:

www.shapeup.org/interactive/rmrl.php

To plan your meals with the Navy Fitness Virtual Meal Builder:

www.navyfitness.org/nutrition/noffs_fueling_series/interactive_mealbuilder/

When on the site, be sure to choose weight loss as your goal and follow the minimum servings offered for each meal or snack. Next download the food selections and serving sizes document below your fueling zone. When you choose your foods, be sure to choose foods that are extremely nutritious. These foods will help you feel more full and provide you with the maximum amount of nutrients. Considering that this is a very restrictive diet for your activity level, it is very important to get the most nutrition out of the foods you eat. It would also be wise to supplement with a daily multivitamin since you are not getting all the nutrients that you need from your diet.

1. Making the Weight: A Case Study From Professional Boxing. *Intern J Sport Nutrition & Exercise Metabolism*. 2010, 20, 80-85. Human Kinetics Inc.

Figure 3

The Cunningham Formula (RMR)= $500 + (22 \times \text{body weight in Lean Body Mass in kilograms})$

First you need to know your LBM. If you weigh 150 pounds and have a 10% body fat, you need to multiply your body weight by 10 percent:

$$150 \times .10 = 15 \text{ pounds of fat.}$$

Then subtract $150 - 15 = 135$ Lean Body Mass in pounds.

Now convert 135 pounds into kilograms by dividing 135 by 2.2:

$$135 / 2.2 = 61.36 \text{ kg/Lean Body Mass}$$

Now plug your lean body mass in kilograms into The Cunningham Formula:

$$\text{RMR} = 500 + (22 \times 61.36)$$

$$\text{RMR} = 500 + (1349.92)$$

$$\text{RMR} = 1849.92$$

Your RMR is 1850 calories. This is how many calories you should target to lose weight at approximately 2 pounds per week with appropriate exercise each day. This is not necessarily a healthy program, but is sport specific for making a lower weight class in a weight class sport.