

How to Cut and Make Weight

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Have any of you ever watched a weight class fight in which one fighter looks far bigger and heavier than the other even though they weighed exactly the same amount the day before?

Have you ever wondered how an athlete can lose 10-15 pounds in one day for a weigh in and then gain it all back for the fight with no ill effects?

Martin Rooney

If you answered “yes” to the two questions above, then you are going to love this month’s article. I am going to cover the basics in the art of weight cutting for competition. If you follow the information correctly in this article, not only will your risk of complications be decreased, but your performance should go to the next level.

Over my last number of years training combat athletes, probably the biggest weakness in terms of knowledge about training had to do with their nutrition. Within the realm of this area was even less knowledge about body weight manipulation, or “cutting weight” for a fight or tournament. I categorize cutting weight under nutrition because of how closely the two are related, but I am not talking about changing diet here. I am talking about the rapid drop in body weight and rapid weight gain before and after a weigh in for a competition.

As I stated earlier, cutting weight is an art form. This means that it takes knowledge, skill and practice. I have seen athletes have horrendous performances by cutting too much weight, cutting weight too fast, cutting weight too slow, not rehydrating correctly, and eating incorrectly after their weigh in. By the end of this article, none of these mistakes should ever happen to you.

Why Cut Weight?

Many people not involved in combative sports do not understand why someone would subject himself to water and food restriction to cut weight in the first place. I usually explain this with the example of weight classes. What this means is that most combative sport competitions have weight limits for certain classes. Since the object of being in a certain weight class would be to be the strongest and heaviest person in that class, many athletes cut their weight down to a lower class only to add weight after the weigh in. In the athlete’s mind, they are then heavier for the

actual fight, and have the potential to be stronger than their opponent (as long as they don't do the exact same thing).

The weigh ins are also usually the day before the fight. This gives the fighters 20-30 hours to reload their bodies following the weight cutting. For anyone that has ever seen Tito Ortiz or Matt Hughes fight, you should understand what I mean. Every time those two athletes fight anyone in the same weight class, they always look much bigger and stronger. The Tito Ortiz/Elvis Sinosic fight, where both fighters weighed in at 204 pounds comes to mind. At fight time, Tito looked 230 and Elvis looked 180. This should hammer home the fact that if things are done correctly, cutting weight has huge advantages.

Don't Forget The Other Half!

Everyone can quickly think of some ways to cut weight. You could stop eating and drinking, you could exercise to sweat a lot in heavy clothes, or you could hop in the sauna for a half hour. All of these methods will be somewhat effective if done correctly to cut weight for a fight or competition. But what about properly putting the weight back on in a safe and timely manner to be ready for the fight? That is where people don't have as many answers. If you think you should just eat and drink to feel good, you are going to run into problems. Do not forget that the reconstitution of your body is as, if not more, important in the cutting weight and gaining it back cycle.

Shedding the Pre Fight Pounds

This next section is going to cover the techniques for adequate weight loss. Before I begin though, I must remind everyone that their diet should be solid at this point, and you should always be within about 10-12 pounds of the weight you want to reach before the weight cutting begins. Any more than this value and things start to get very dangerous. This means that you should control your caloric intake long before the fight, and get to 10-12 pounds away from the desired weigh in weight. By doing this, you will have much less to worry about when the fight approaches.

Fluid Restriction

The simplest and most effective way to begin the weight cutting process is to decrease or stop fluid intake. Your body is constantly losing fluid by breathing, sweating and urination. Every minute and hour that this goes by without replacing the fluid, you will lose weight. This process takes no extra energy from a fighter to complete, and you can lose up to 5-6 pounds in 24 hours without drinking. My athletes never go over 24 hours without fluid, and we usually start the fluid restriction exactly 24 hours before the weigh in. Before beginning the fluid restriction, there are some tricks to losing the maximum amount of fluid over that 24 hours.

For the fifth, fourth and third days before the weigh in, I have my athletes consume 2 gallons of water a day. They carry the gallon jug around with them so they know how much fluid they are taking in. At this time, the athlete also can be more liberal with sodium in his diet (we don't go heavy on the sodium, but a little increase can help later as you will see). This increased water

intake triggers hormones in the body to excrete more urine than usual. This response will be essential in losing fluid the day before the weigh in. Two days before the weigh in, the fighter cuts the fluid intake to one gallon of water, and cuts out the sodium from the diet. Finally, the last day before the weigh in, the fighter takes in no fluids, no sodium, and only food that I will describe later. This process is effortless, and only requires a little discipline and tolerance of a dry mouth.

Sweating

The next most popular way to decrease weight before a weigh in is to sweat out fluid from the body. This can be done in a number of ways, and can take off 5-10 pounds of weight in a short period of time depending on the conditions. This is a great method because even if the athlete is already lean, there will still be fluid that can be lost. The limitations to this method are that it requires great amounts of energy expenditure, and can sap strength from the fight the next day. The goal for using this method would be to take off the weight you need to lose with the least amount of fatigue for the athlete.

The simplest way to use this method is to exercise. That can be as simple as running or jumping rope, to as complex as cardio fight circuits involving punching, kicks, takedowns and sprinting. Depending on how quickly you need to lose the weight and the temperature of the area you are in, you will get a feel for what style you need to use. In addition to the exercise, athletes commonly use plastic suits and heavy clothing to increase the body temperature and enhance the sweating response. Just remember not to overheat. Athletes have actually died from overheating using some of these methods. (I must repeat that the goal is to be within 10 pounds by the day before the weigh in so that any methods you use don't need to be drastic).

In addition to exercise, athletes can also use a sauna or hot bath or shower to lose fluid as well. A dry sauna is the most powerful of the three for weight loss and this loss should be monitored. Time spent in the sauna or hot showers should be at small 15-30 minute intervals to check weight loss. This brings up a great point that it would be a good idea to travel with your own scale to monitor how much weight you are losing. The last thing you need to do is lose too much weight. We always travel with a scale to keep track of our weight status.

Bowel Emptying

Another method to lose weight is to empty the bowels the day before the weigh in. This is another method that requires no effort and will not hurt performance if done correctly. Your bowels, or stomach and intestines, are up to 28 feet long and contain up to 5-7 pounds of material at all times. The food that has been ingested over the last 24 hours is all still contained along this set of tubes. This material does not help performance and is actually waste. By clearing out the bowels, an athlete can lose another 5 pounds without having to do anything.

The secret is in the methods. Two days before the weigh in, an athlete will already be eating less if he has to lose critical pounds. The day before the weigh in, he should not be eating much at all (to be discussed later). That material that is still in the gut from the day before, however, must be cleared. How we choose to do this is with a very gentle, all natural laxative. There are much

more powerful drugs out there that do this, but you should not be using them. They can hurt your performance and leave you feeling horrible. By taking the gentle, natural laxative before you go to bed the night before the weigh in, you should wake and clear your bowels completely. Remember that you would only do this if you felt you were not going to make the weight with the methods listed above.

Eating

Yes, I did put eating as something to do while you are cutting weight. You must make sure that your blood sugar levels are normal during this process or you are going to feel horrible and have no energy for the exercise aspect of the weight cutting. The last thing you want to do is take in fluids with sugar or heavy foods at this point. That is why we use a simple Balance Bar to get the job done. The bar only weighs a few ounces, but it will give you some sugar and fuel that your body can use during the fluid and food fast.

You Made It, Now What to do Next

Ok, you made the weight and you are feeling good. Now as soon as you get off the scale, you need to start refilling your body with everything you lost. As I said before, this piece of the process is as important as the weight reduction. Most people make big mistakes here that end up leading to disaster during the fight.

When you are cutting weight, your plasma blood volume decreases, and your blood pressure can increase as a result. In addition to this, your resting heart rate can go up, you can experience fatigue and feel psychologically weak. You need to make sure you reverse these processes not only as quickly as possible, but correctly and completely. Most people ram a bunch of food and water back into the system right after the weigh in, but they do not finish the job.

After the weigh in, you should eat small meals at regular 30 minute intervals. It is critical that you make sure you take in carbohydrates at this time to regain the proper blood sugar levels. Firing a ton of food down immediately after the weigh in is going to leave you feeling bloated and sick. Your body won't be able to use all the food at once anyway, and it will just sit there. Smaller meals will clear the stomach and you will be able to eat again shortly. We actually have our athletes continue to eat all the way up to a few hours before the fight the next day. Eat meals that you are comfortable with. Don't start to do anything different.

More importantly is getting the fluid balance back. You should immediately take in fluids following the weigh in and continue to drink at regular intervals. The ultimate goal for my fighters is to see a clear urine stream before we know we are back. This can take 3-5 gallons of fluid over the next day to replace the 10 or more pounds that has been lost. Don't rely on the thirst response because it will not be accurate. You need to keep drinking to make sure that the blood plasma, fluid space between the cells and the cells themselves are refilled. An I.V. is also a good option here, but it can and should only be performed by a skilled medical professional. There are many dangers involved in this procedure. This is usually used as a last resort or in a medical emergency. If everything, from the weight cutting to the weight regaining has been done correctly and you have 24 hours until the fight, there should be no need for intravenous fluids.

A Few Pieces of Advice

A main motto of mine is that you never try something new a week before the fight. This stands for new techniques, new foods, new equipment, and especially weight cutting. This is something that needs to be practiced just like ground or stand up techniques. You would never attempt a technique in a fight that you have never tried before. You must think the same way about cutting weight. You need to understand everything about it. You must know how to do it, how long it will take your body to lose the weight, and exactly how your body is going to feel. If you don't ever practice, you are looking to add stress and potential disaster to the plan. Practice, and the better you master the weight cutting, the easier it will be to perform when the time comes.

Another mistake I have also seen at weigh ins is that a fighter may think they made the weight and then still be too heavy. This occurs when a fighter only weighs himself on his scale and does not use the official scale for the event. Remember that you will have access to the official scale, and you should monitor your weight according to it. This is the only way to know if you have correctly made the weight or not. The last thing you need to be doing is frantically exercising trying to cut weight in the last few minutes. The less stress and adrenaline release, the better.

I hope you have learned something from this article. Remember that weight cutting is an art and must be taken very seriously. When used correctly, it can be a powerful tool that can lead to victory. When used incorrectly, it can be a powerful obstacle that can lead to defeat. This, like any art, must be practiced a number of times in advance. Only then can you begin to truly understand its power.

Currently, Martin Rooney is the director of the Parisi Speed School. Martin has prepared champions for the UFC, Pride, Pancrase as well as champions of the Mundials, Pan Ams and Olympic Judo. He has also traveled as far as Brazil, Japan and the Middle East to conduct seminars and help prepare fighters. In addition to training many world champion martial artists, Martin has also been a speed consultant to the New York Giants, Cincinnati Bengals, Arizona State University, Oregon State University, as well as other athletes from the NFL, MLB, NBA, WNBA and numerous top Division I colleges across the country. He has also trained numerous Olympians including one gold, and two silver medalists. His book and DVD, Training for Warriors, can be purchased at parisischool.com