



The Difference Between an Improvement Season versus Offseason is Your Mindset

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hat's the difference? Let's start with off season. Often, competitors have over-dieted and overdone the cardio amounts in order to get stage lean. When that happens and restrictions have been extremely low, the splurge comes into the picture. This leads to days, if not weeks and months of binge eating every food in sight and losing all sight of future goals. You will hear "everyone needs an offseason" which is completely false for the majority of people who are true athletes. When you are an athlete you work every day to perfect your craft and set yourself up for success when the competition day comes. The days post show are your "training days" and the days where you decide if you are an athlete or a competitor. Competitors compete but that does not make them athletes.

less is not always more. Your body is a machine that needs nutrients. Here's where improvement season comes in.

What is an example of what an improvement season looks like? Again, everyone is different. I stick to a plan year-round. So, when a show ends, I already have my food planned for the days post show. I then begin to incorporate cheat meals once a week. BUT, be conscious of your metabolism. If you weren't burning food quickly going into the show, you will need to check in with yourself and your nutritionist to make sure your body is ready for foods that you have not been eating often. Within these weeks, I have a set number of cardio bouts. Some people believe in doing no cardio in the "improvement season" but that is a personal decision. I'm an athlete so I will never be a fan of cardio abstinence. Now

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Mindset is what differentiates a competitor from an athlete and off season from improvement season. When you decide to have an improvement season, you have officially recognized the importance of slowly reverse dieting out of your plan and the benefits it can lead to. The goal should be to be as healthy as possible year-round and that looks different for everyone. There is no set number on the scale or set macro breakdown that will be the same for everyone.

Going into these seasons, it's important to know what the body goes through in prep and the WHY of being more strategic with your health.

When you diet down to actual stage lean, your hormones take a hit. Chances are the cardio was higher than your metabolism was comfortable with and the food was lowered in order to see the desired conditioning for stage. Keep in mind, everyone is different. As women, our hormones fluctuate more than men which often changes the menstrual cycle for premenopausal women. Beyond notification of child bearing capabilities, the ability to menstruate contributes to bone health which is crucial for everyday living. Beyond menstruation, your hormones have to be in a place where your body wants to lose body fat for the next show. In order to do that, the body has to regulate the hormone levels and reinvigorate your metabolism so that you are eating enough to be able to have calories dropped for prep. Contrary to popular belief,

we've covered nutrition and cardio, next is lifting. You should be aiming to repair any injuries you have had during prep meanwhile strategizing to bring up lagging body parts. During this season, aim to find new exercises you love or aim to be even stronger at the lifts your currently dislike. The ultimate goal is to allow your body time where it can get the adequate amount of fat that won't have you doing long bouts of cardio. Now, the amount of cardio everyone will need is also specific to many variables that differ person to person.

The Goal. Do less than you had to do the previous show and feel and look better doing it. You want to have a season long enough where the food and happiness are higher than they've been previously, while cardio is lower, and your body feels like a machine that is simply ready to work.

Many people struggle with the idea of staying on a plan year-round but always remember everything is a strategy. If you claim to want to progress, don't allow yourself to backtrack. Your last show physique should be your starting point for the next show. Once you set the plan, stick to it and see how much better you feel about yourself knowing that you have already progressed from the last show by simply having a little more dedication to the sport in which you wish to be successful. The fewer variables you create for yourself, the smoother your next prep should be. Foresight is everything. Plan for your best prep yet, every show.