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Personalized Diet Planning and Calorie Calculation A Comprehensive Analysis of Evidence-Based Methodologies and Technological Innovations

Prof. Syed Rehan[1], Anjali Nandkishor Manwar[2], Simoli Shailesh Poddar[3], Saleha Parveen Ansari[4]
[1]Associate Professor, Dept. of Computer Science and Engineering, Anjuman College of Engineering and Technology, Nagpur, India
[2,3,4]UG Scholar, Dept. of Computer Science and Engineering, Anjuman College of Engineering and Technology, Nagpur, India
Emails: *sayedrehanone@gmail.com[1], anjalimanwar51@gmail.com[2], simolipoddar145@gmail.com[3], sawlehaansari143@gmail.com[4]*

Abstract
Diet-linked chronic conditions — obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension — persist at epidemic scale despite widespread availability of nutritional information. Existing calorie-tracking tools reduce human metabolism to generic lookup tables, largely ignore food-safety considerations, and offer no clinically grounded dietary feedback. This paper describes a web-based platform integrating four mutually reinforcing modules: a Mifflin-St Jeor basal metabolic rate engine, a goal-directed personalized diet planner, an ingredient-level allergen detection unit, and a WHO-classified BMI calculator. Built on a Python/Flask backend with React frontend and PostgreSQL database, the system computes individualized total daily energy expenditure (TDEE), derives macronutrient targets by declared dietary goal, flags allergens in real time, and recalculates remaining caloric budget after every logged meal. A six-week pilot with 120 participants produced 74.3% diet adherence, 97.3% allergen detection accuracy, and a mean absolute calorie estimation error of 112 kcal/day — confirming that clinical accuracy and accessible interface design are compatible, not competing, objectives.
Keywords- *calorie calculator, personalized diet planning, allergen detection, BMI calculator, TDEE, Mifflin-St Jeor, digital health, nutritional tracking*

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Motivation

Chronic non-communicable diseases tied to diet account for roughly 41 million deaths each year — approximately 74 percent of total global mortality [1]. Obesity rates have tripled since 1975 and now affect more than one billion people worldwide. The central paradox of this crisis is that nutritional data has rarely been so easy to obtain. Calorie-tracking applications surpassed 500 million active users globally by 2025, and the personalized nutrition market crossed $11 billion that same year [2, 14]. Yet sustained tool usage collapses within two to four weeks of adoption, and caloric estimates routinely deviate from laboratory metabolic measurements by 20 to 30 percent. Standard population-level guidelines cannot account for the metabolic variability separating one person's energy requirement from another's [3]. A sedentary 55-year-old woman and an active 22-year-old male athlete may fall in the same national dietary category yet require caloric targets differing by over 1,000 kcal per day. Research by Chen et al. across 4,200 adults found 71 percent rated real-time personalized feedback more valuable than generalized meal recommendations [4].

1.2. Problem Statement

Three structural failures define existing calorie-tracking tools. First, most applications rely on the Harris-Benedict equation — derived in 1919 from 239 subjects — despite Frankenfield et al. confirming that Mifflin-St Jeor yields significantly lower error across obese and non-obese adult cohorts [6, 8]. Second, allergen detection is absent or superficial in virtually all platforms, a serious gap given that food allergy affects roughly 11 percent of adults [4]. Third, BMI computation remains isolated from dietary planning in every existing consumer tool; a user's weight classification never influences their caloric target. Fewer than 30 percent of users sustained daily logging beyond four weeks, with cognitive load as the primary abandonment reason [14]. Consumer research confirms growing preference for automated, low-friction tools delivering immediate individualized feedback [20].

1.3. Research Objectives

This study pursues four objectives: (1) implement a Mifflin-St Jeor TDEE engine with goal-adjusted caloric targets [5]; (2) construct a personalized diet planner generating macronutrient-balanced meal recommendations [15]; (3) develop an ingredient-level allergen detection module flagging declared sensitivities in real time [4]; (4) integrate WHO-classified BMI as an active input configuring dietary goal-setting [9]. The system is assessed against accuracy benchmarks and user adherence over a six-week pilot.

1.4.Paper Organisation

Section II surveys relevant literature. Section III describes the methodology. Section IV presents system design. Section V covers implementation. Section VI reports pilot results. Section VII analyses findings. Section VIII concludes. The study follows the PRISMA reporting framework [7].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Calorie Estimation and Metabolic Equations

Energy balance — the ratio of caloric intake to expenditure — governs body-weight regulation [1]. Harris and Benedict published the first widely adopted BMR equations in 1919 from 239 subjects [8]. Those formulas overestimate BMR by 5 to 15 percent in present-day populations, particularly in individuals with higher fat mass. Mifflin et al. revised this approach in 1990 using 498 subjects spanning a wider weight and age range [5]. A systematic review by Frankenfield et al. across 3,468 subjects confirmed that Mifflin-St Jeor produced the lowest mean bias of all tested predictive models [6]. WHO Technical Report No. 724 formalized TDEE activity multipliers from 1.2 to 1.9 [9], confirmed by the US Physical Activity Guidelines Committee [11]. A University of Vermont clinical study validated TDEE-guided targets as superior to fixed-deficit approaches for sustained weight loss [12].

2.2.Personalized Diet Planning

The personalized nutrition market grew from \$8.2 billion in 2020 to \$11.4 billion in 2024 [15]. Smith et al. concluded that population-based dietary advice has reached a practical ceiling and that future gains require individually tailored, technology-mediated strategies [3]. Nutrigenomics research expanded understanding of how genetic variation shapes nutrient metabolism, reaching a \$590 million market in 2024 [19]. Aggressive caloric deficits remain clinically problematic because they trigger adaptive thermogenesis and lean mass loss [16].

2.3. Allergen Detection in Digital Tools

Food allergy affects approximately 8 percent of children and 11 percent of adults in high-income countries [4]. A review of the 20 most-downloaded calorie-tracking applications found only three incorporated any allergen flagging, and none operated at the ingredient level within generated meal plans. The nine major allergen groups — milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soy, and sesame — cause over 90 percent of allergic reactions. Ingredient-level tagging is necessary because composite dishes contain allergens through sub-ingredients not visible in the dish name [4].

2.4. BMI as a Dietary Planning Input

BMI — weight (kg) divided by height squared (m2) — remains WHO's primary screening metric for weight-related health risk [9]. A 2026 clinical workflow document confirmed that integrating BMR, TDEE, and BMI classification into a single pipeline produces more sustainable targets than any one metric applied independently [10]. No published consumer system had operationalized this integration before the present work [13].

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

This study follows a design-and-evaluate methodology: a functional system was designed from clinically validated equations, implemented as a deployable web application, and assessed over a six-week pilot. The PRISMA framework guided the literature synthesis underpinning design decisions [7]. Calorie estimation accuracy was benchmarked against indirect calorimetry. Allergen detection accuracy was measured against manually verified ground-truth ingredient lists. User adherence and satisfaction were collected through structured logs and post-pilot surveys.

3.2 System Workflow

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Figure 1 presents the complete system flowchart, tracing every step from user registration through profile input, BMI classification, TDEE computation, goal selection, caloric target derivation, meal plan generation, allergen detection, meal logging, and real-time budget adjustment to final insights display. The allergen decision branch separates flagged and safe meal items, ensuring the safety pathway is architecturally enforced rather than optional.

3.3 System Architecture

Figure 2 illustrates the four-layer stack. The User Interface Layer (React.js) handles all interaction. The Application Logic Layer contains four functional engines: BMI Calculator, Calorie/TDEE Engine, Diet Planner, and Allergen Detection. A Flask REST API with SQLAlchemy ORM mediates all data exchange. The Data Layer uses PostgreSQL. The Output Layer assembles calorie reports, meal plans, allergen alerts, and progress insights.

3.4 Data Sources and Validation

Nutritional data is drawn from USDA FoodData Central, supplemented with curated entries for traditional Indian cuisine absent from USDA records. Allergen metadata follows the nine regulatory-recognized groups. All entries are cross-validated against primary nutritional literature before inclusion. BMR equations are applied exactly as published by Mifflin et al. [5], preserving the validated accuracy reported by Frankenfield et al. [6].

4. Proposed System Design

4.1. BMI Calculator Module

BMI is computed from user-supplied weight and height: BMI = weight (kg) / height2 (m2). The result maps onto four WHO thresholds: underweight (<18.5), normal weight (18.5-24.9), overweight (25.0-29.9), and obese (>=30.0) [9]. This classification feeds directly into goal configuration — underweight users are locked to caloric surplus, obese users default to a deficit, and normal-weight users hold targets at maintenance TDEE. BMI thus functions as an active dietary planning input, not a standalone display metric.

4.2. Calorie and TDEE Engine

BMR is computed using the Mifflin-St Jeor equations [5], selected over Harris-Benedict based on Frankenfield et al.'s systematic review [6]:

Men: BMR = (10xW) + (6.25xH) - (5xA) + 5

Women: BMR = (10xW) + (6.25xH) - (5xA) - 161

where W = weight (kg), H = height (cm), A = age (years). TDEE = BMR x activity factor from 1.2 (sedentary) to 1.9 (athlete), drawn from WHO Technical Report No. 724 [9, 11]. Caloric targets apply a 500 kcal/day deficit for weight loss, TDEE for maintenance, and 300-500 kcal/day surplus for muscle gain, aligned with University of Vermont clinical protocols [12].

4.3.Allergen Detection Module

Each food item carries allergen metadata for all nine regulatory groups. When a user declares sensitivities, the system scans every ingredient of every recommended or logged meal and raises a prominently displayed warning for any match. Detection operates at the ingredient level — not the dish-name level — so allergens embedded in composite recipes are captured [4]. The system also suggests verified allergen-free alternatives within the same calorie tier, replacing rather than simply removing an option.

4.4.Personalized Diet Planner Module

The planner generates structured daily meal recommendations across breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks, calibrated to each user's caloric target. Macronutrient distributions vary by goal: 30% protein / 45% carbohydrate / 25% fat for weight loss; 25% / 50% / 25% for maintenance; 30% / 40% / 30% for muscle gain. Food items are drawn from approximately 8,000 entries sourced from USDA FoodData Central and regional Indian cuisine records [15]. An adaptive logging feature recalculates remaining daily targets after each meal entry, enabling real-time mid-day adjustment [16].

5. Implementation

5.1 Technology Stack

The backend runs on Python 3.11 with Flask for routing and REST endpoint management. NumPy and Pandas handle nutritional computation. PostgreSQL with SQLAlchemy provides structured storage for user profiles, food items, allergen tags, and dietary logs. The frontend uses React 18 with functional components and hooks; Tailwind CSS governs responsive layout. Chart.js renders progress dashboard visualizations. Authentication relies on bcrypt-hashed session tokens. All computation logic — BMR, TDEE, macronutrient allocation — is

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encapsulated in independently unit-tested Python modules [17, 18]. Client-server communication is encrypted over HTTPS.

5.2 Nutritional Database

The database integrates USDA FoodData Central as its primary source, supplemented with approximately 600 manually curated entries for Indian regional cuisine absent from USDA records. Each entry stores caloric value per 100 g, macronutrient breakdown, 12 key micronutrient values, allergen tags for all nine regulatory groups, and food category classification. The current dataset covers approximately 8,000 food items, all validated against primary nutritional sources before inclusion.

5.3 Testing and Quality Assurance

Unit tests cover all BMR, TDEE, and macronutrient calculation functions with known input-output pairs derived from clinical benchmarks [5, 6]. Integration tests verify that the frontend, API, and database communicate correctly across all user flows. Allergen detection was tested against 200 manually verified composite food items measuring precision and recall separately for each of the nine allergen groups. Frontend responsiveness was validated across mobile, tablet, laptop, and desktop viewports.

6. Results and Evaluation

6.1. Macronutrient Distribution Validation

Figure 3 visualizes the macronutrient distributions applied by the diet planner across three goal types. The weight-loss configuration prioritizes protein at 30 percent to preserve lean mass under a caloric deficit. The maintenance configuration applies a balanced 25/50/25 split. The muscle-gain configuration raises fat to 30 percent to support hormonal function during a caloric surplus — macro ratios consistent with evidence reviewed by Frankenfield et al. [6].

6.2. System Performance Metrics

The system was evaluated across 120 users over six weeks. Calorie estimation accuracy was benchmarked against indirect calorimetry for a 30-participant subset, yielding a mean absolute error of 112 kcal/day — within the published accuracy range for Mifflin-St Jeor in non-clinical settings [6]. Allergen detection correctly flagged declared allergens in 97.3 percent of meal items; two missed detections traced to incomplete sub-ingredient metadata were subsequently corrected. Table 1 summarises all evaluation metrics.

Table 1 System Evaluation Metrics (N = 120, 6-Week Pilot)

Metric	Result
Calorie Estimation MAE	112 kcal/day
Allergen Detection Accuracy	97.3%
BMI Classification Accuracy	100%
Task Completion Rate	91.2%
Mean Session Duration	8.4 min
6-Week Diet Adherence	74.3%
User Satisfaction (1-5)	4.3 / 5.0
System Uptime (pilot)	99.6%

6.3. User Adherence and Engagement

Diet-plan adherence — defined as logging at least two meals per day on five or more days per week — reached 74.3 percent over six weeks, substantially exceeding the 30 to 40 percent rates reported for conventional manual food diaries [14]. Post-evaluation surveys identified the adaptive calorie budget as the primary driver of continued engagement: users reported that real-time remaining-budget feedback removed the all-or-nothing psychological penalty common in restrictive dieting [16]. The allergen detection feature received the highest satisfaction ratings among users with declared sensitivities. A task completion rate of 91.2 percent across the full onboarding-to-meal-plan flow confirms that clinical depth did not compromise usability. Mean session duration of 8.4 minutes aligns with optimal engagement windows for digital health tools [20].

7. Discussion

Three findings carry implications beyond this system. The 112 kcal/day mean absolute error confirms that Mifflin-St Jeor, deployed correctly, achieves dietary guidance accuracy without laboratory infrastructure [5, 6]. The continued use of Harris-Benedict in commercial applications is not a matter of competing evidence; it reflects inertia that these results reinforce the case for correcting [8]. The 74.3 percent six-week adherence rate challenges the assumption that digital dietary tracking tools plateau in engagement within two weeks. The adaptive budget mechanism — which absorbs early-meal overages into later adjustments rather than marking the day a failure — appears to interrupt the abandonment cycle documented in app engagement research [14]. This design principle transfers to any tracking platform, not exclusively nutrition tools. Allergen detection accuracy of 97.3 percent at the ingredient level demonstrates that food-safety functionality is achievable within a consumer nutrition tool without sensor hardware [4]. The residual 2.7 percent miss rate points to incomplete ingredient metadata as the binding constraint, not the detection logic — a finding that positions database completeness as the key improvement target. Several limitations apply. The 120-user pilot is insufficient to establish demographic generalizability. The absence of a randomized control group prevents causal attribution of adherence gains to specific features. Longitudinal health outcomes — BMI trajectory, sustained dietary behaviour, biomarker changes — were not measured. The database also underrepresents ultra-processed foods and several regional cuisines, reducing recommendation relevance for affected users.

Conclusion

This paper designed and evaluated a unified digital nutrition system addressing four persistent failures in existing tools: inaccurate calorie estimation, absent allergen safety, isolated BMI computation, and static meal recommendations. Anchoring the calorie engine in Mifflin-St Jeor equations [5] with WHO-validated TDEE multipliers [9, 11] produced a 112 kcal/day mean error — sufficient for clinical dietary guidance. Ingredient-level allergen detection achieved 97.3 percent coverage. BMI-linked goal configuration eliminated the disconnection between weight classification and caloric targets that characterises most current platforms. Across the six-week pilot, 91.2 percent task completion and 74.3 percent adherence exceeded published benchmarks [14], confirming that clinical precision and accessible design reinforce rather than undermine each other. Three priorities will guide future development: a randomized controlled trial measuring actual health outcomes over 12 months; wearable integration enabling real-time activity-based TDEE recalculation; and nutritional database expansion for broader regional cuisine coverage. The modular architecture accommodates all three extensions without structural redesign.

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