



Weight Gain: Building Muscle and Strength

Here's the Deal

Weight gain requires that your body is in positive energy balance, meaning you take in more calories than you burn. Athletes wanting to gain weight should focus on gaining muscle (lean mass) while maintaining or even reducing body fat. Success takes lots of hard work and consistency. A good weight room regimen goes hand-in-hand with your nutrition plan.

Many athletes who want to gain weight make the mistake of eating lots of high-fat foods (such as fast foods, fried foods, chips, etc.). You are trying to gain muscle, not body fat, and stay as healthy as you can, so the quality of what you eat matters! Be patient: Gaining muscle takes TIME. Aim for 1–3 pounds per week—more than that is probably not increased lean muscle tissue.

Don't make the mistake of depending on dietary supplements for your weight gain goals. First of all, no supplement can take the place of adequate calories and quality foods and drinks. We also get lots of additional health and performance benefits from foods that supplements may not provide. Finally, the safety, purity, and legality of dietary supplements should always be addressed before using them.

Get in the Know

- To gain weight, eat more calories than you burn.
- Eat 6 or more times every day.
- Make sure you're getting enough protein (the building block of muscle) and carbohydrates (the fuel for muscle).
- Practice good recovery nutrition.
- Remember that dehydration, inadequate sleep, and high stress levels can work against your goals.

Tips for muscle gain

- Maximize eating opportunities.
- Eat breakfast every day.
- Drink high-calorie drinks throughout the day.
- Plan ahead for weekends. Avoid 5 steps forward during the week and 2 steps backward during the weekends.
- Beware of roadblocks to weight gain.

What are eating opportunities?

Be prepared to eat throughout the day, no matter where you are or what your schedule is. Take easy-to-pack snacks like sports

bars, fruit, juices, trail mix, cheese and crackers, nuts, sunflower seeds, tuna packs, and granola bars along during the day. That way, you'll always be able to eat when you get a free minute. Don't be caught hungry and without fuel. By the time you feel hunger, you're past the point when you should have eaten.

Why breakfast?

Breakfast is a perfect time to add power calories. Just grabbing a sandwich and a banana when you head out the door in the morning can add over 400 calories to your daily intake. In one month, that could potentially equal three pounds of weight gain! Breakfast doesn't need to be eaten sitting down. To get one step ahead, pack a container with leftovers, a bagel with cream cheese, or a cereal bar with yogurt and a juice box before you go to bed so you'll be all set in the morning rush.

Why drinks?

High-calorie beverages are an easy way to add calories without feeling stuffed. Drink a big glass of juice or milk (or fruit smoothie prepared with fresh or frozen fruit, yogurt or milk, and ice) when you get up in the morning. Carry bottles of high-calorie juices like grape, cranberry, pineapple, apple, or juice blends. Drink sports drinks in place of water with meals. You'll stay well-hydrated while getting in extra calories. Milkshakes are also a great way to add quick calories. Some large fast food milkshakes have 1,000+ calories and give you protein and calcium that soda and fruit drinks don't have.

TIMEOUT

Boost recovery nutrition

Eat immediately after workouts. Your body is best at using nutrients to restore energy, build muscle, and adapt to training right after workouts. Get in 500 calories within 30 minutes, with $\frac{2}{3}$ of those calories coming from carbohydrate and $\frac{1}{3}$ coming from protein.

Recovery nutrition ideas

- Sandwich and chocolate or strawberry-flavored milk
- Meal replacement shake and fruit
- Peanut butter crackers and fruit juice
- Trail mix and a sports drink
- Sports bar, fruit, and water
- Cheese, pretzels, and fruit juice
- Big bowl of cereal and milk
- Smoothie or milkshake

Weight gain roadblocks

Other than skipping meals, eating too little, or making poor food selections, there are many lifestyle factors that can serve as weight gain obstacles. Chronic dehydration can slow down your weight gain progress, as can an unusual amount of stress or getting inadequate sleep. Missing weekend meals because of sleeping in can mean you sleep right through your chances to get in more fuel. Take good care of yourself!

This handout was designed by Sports Dietitians Michelle Rockwell, MS, RD, CSSD and Susan Kundrat, MS, RD, CSSD to provide general education. For specific concerns, refer to your sports medicine team.

Bottom Line

To gain weight, eat more calories than you burn. Strategies to help accomplish that goal include:

- Eat a hearty breakfast.
- Be prepared and take advantage of all opportunities to eat.
- Drinking high-calorie beverages can get calories in while avoiding feeling full.
- Stay hydrated and get good rest.
- Eat a snack or meal with carbohydrates and protein within 30 minutes of your workout.

INSIDE SCOOP

More calorie-boosting quick tips

- At each meal and snack, eat a little more. If you're used to one slice of cheese on your sandwich, add 2 (+100 calories). If you're used to 1 cup of rice at dinner, go for 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups. If you're used to a 16-ounce fruit juice, go for the 20-ounce bottle.
- Take advantage of the calories in healthy fats. Choose oily salad dressings, trans fat-free margarines, nuts/seeds/nut butters, pesto, avocado and guacamole, and fish. So, dip your bread in olive oil and parmesan cheese; top your pasta with pesto; sprinkle almonds and olive oil in your veggies; add guacamole to your tacos and burritos; and top pizza and sandwiches with olives.
- Add high-calorie toppings. Salad dressings, cheese sauce or sprinkled cheese, olive oil, peanut butter, hummus, cream cheese, guacamole, and reduced fat sour cream can be top-notch energy boosters.
- Don't allow yourself to get too hungry.