



Weight Gain

1.15

Weight Gain Keys

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

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

What you need to know

Most athletes should focus on gaining muscle (lean mass) while maintaining or even reducing body fat. The recipe for success is simple, but takes lots of hard work and consistency. A good weight room regimen goes hand-in-hand with your nutrition plan.

Successful weight gain requires the body to be in positive energy balance, meaning you are taking in more calories than you are burning on a consistent basis. As a start, add 1,000–1,500 calories to the amount you already are eating.

What if I don't like counting calories?

If you don't want to actually count up the calories you eat, just eat 6 or more times a day. If you're taking in fuel this frequently (every 2–3 hours), you'll be boosting your calories as long as you choose high-energy foods. No meal needs to be huge—you don't need to feel stuffed—because you'll be eating again shortly. Try having breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with 3 or more additional snacks.

✓ **TIP** Maximize “eating opportunities”

Many athletes don't put enough fuel in their bodies because they haven't thought ahead through the day's schedule. By taking 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, it doesn't matter where you are or what your schedule is—you'll always be able to eat when you get a free minute. Don't be caught hungry and without fuel.

✓ **TIP** Make time for breakfast every day

Just by grabbing a peanut butter sandwich and a banana when you head out the door in the morning, you can add over 400 calories to your daily intake. In one month, that small change could potentially equal three pounds of weight gain! Since time is often a big issue with athletes on the run, remember that breakfast doesn't need to be eaten sitting down. To get one step ahead, pack a sandwich, a bagel with cream cheese, or a cereal bar with yogurt and a juice box before you go to bed.

What should I be eating?

Protein

Include protein in most of your meals and snacks. In addition to playing many other important roles in training and recovery, it is the building block of new muscle tissue. Protein sources include meats, fish, chicken, turkey, eggs, milk, yogurt, soy foods, nuts, and beans.

Carbohydrates

Some athletes put too much focus on protein when trying to gain weight. Don't forget that carbohydrates are not only important for fueling your workouts (including weight lifting), but are required for making new muscle, too. Each meal and snack should contain carbs.

Best choice HIGH ENERGY carbohydrates:

- Pasta, rice, breads, cereals, rolls, bagels, muffins, and tortillas (wheat, oat, or bran when possible)
- Starchy veggies (corn, peas, potatoes, and sweet potatoes)
- 100% fruit juices or smoothies
- Dried fruits like raisins, craisins, dried apricots, dried cherries, dried pineapple, and dried papaya
- Sports bars with at least 20 grams of carbohydrate per bar

Think drinks!

High-calorie beverages are an easy way to add calories without feeling stuffed. Drink a big glass of juice or milk (or a milkshake) when you get up in the morning. Carry bottles of high-calorie juices like grape, cranberry, pineapple, apple, or juice blends (strawberry-orange-banana, cran-grape) with you during the day. Drink sports drinks in place of water with meals—you'll stay well hydrated while getting in extra calories. At restaurants, order milkshakes, juices, or drinks like lemonade or punch. Enjoy fruit smoothies (prepared with milk or yogurt for added protein). Blend up a homemade milkshake with ice cream, milk, and frozen fruit before going to bed to boost calories by at least 500 per day.

Make big gains through recovery nutrition

Your body is best at using nutrients to restore energy, build muscle, and adapt to training when taken in immediately after workouts. Get in 500 calories right after workouts (within 30 minutes), with 2/3 of those calories coming from carbohydrate and 1/3 coming from protein.

Recovery Nutrition Ideas

- Sandwich (meat) and chocolate milk
- PBJ sandwich and fruit juice
- Sports bar, fruit, and a sports drink
- Big bowl of cereal and milk
- Meal replacement shake and fruit
- Trail mix and a sports drink
- Cheese and crackers and fruit juice
- Smoothie or milkshake

✓ **FINAL TIP 1** Don't fall back on weekends

Sleeping in on the weekends can be a great reward for a long week. But when you're trying to gain muscle mass, you can sleep right through your chances to bulk up with solid nutrition. Avoid taking steps backward by making a nutrition plan for Saturday and Sunday in addition to weekdays.

✓ **FINAL TIP 2:** Watch out for other weight gain deterrents

Chronic dehydration can slow down your weight gain progress. So can an unusual amount of stress or getting inadequate sleep. Take care of yourself!

BONUS POINT

High-calorie Meal Plan

(5,000+ calories and 200+ grams of protein)

Breakfast:

- 3 eggs, scrambled with cheese
- 3 waffles, pancakes, or slices of whole grain toast
- margarine, jelly, or syrup
- banana or fresh fruit
- 16 ounces of 100% juice

Snack in class:

- bagel with peanut butter
- 16 ounces of 100% juice
(apple, grape, cranberry, pineapple are best)

Lunch:

- 2 turkey, ham, roast beef, or grilled chicken sandwiches on whole grain bread
- 1 bowl of veggie soup or small side of veggies
- 1 apple, peach, or pear
- 1 cup yogurt or cottage cheese
- 16 ounces of 100% juice and 16 ounces of lowfat milk

Dinner:

Make the most of your dinner as a chance to refuel and recover from afternoon workouts:

- 6–8 ounces of lean meat
(the size of at least 2 decks of cards)
- 1 bowl of pasta, rice, potatoes, corn, or other starch
- 1 bowl of soup, or veggies, or salad
- dessert
- 16 ounces of 100% juice and 16 ounces of lowfat milk

Night Snacks Ideas:

- peanut butter and jelly sandwich with a fruit smoothie
- or homemade milkshake with 1 cup ice cream, 1 cup lowfat milk, and ¼ cup peanut butter
- or 1 large bean burrito with 16 ounces 100% orange juice
- or 1 serving chicken and veggies with rice take-out meal
- or 1 turkey/cheese/veggie sub sandwich with 16 ounces 100% apple juice

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.