

Nutritional Strategies for Healthy Weight Gain from a Sports Nutrition Expert

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Gaining weight might seem like an easy task, but that's not the case for many athletes. It requires consuming more calories than you expend. That means, enough food to support normal growth and development, exercise and training and the additional calories needed for muscular development. Fitting in that much food between going to school, practice, strength training sessions and competitions can be a big challenge.

HOW DOES STRENGTH TRAINING HELP PERFORMANCE?

Cross training is an important part of an athlete's training regimen. Strength athletes are not the only ones who can benefit from building lean muscle; it can also mean a performance benefit for endurance athletes. More muscle typically means more strength, but a greater lean mass can also result in improved speed and endurance. This is important for sports like swimming, running, and cycling. In addition, adding more lean muscle in sports like football, hockey, baseball, softball, soccer and basketball can give the athlete more power over their competition.

GAINING WEIGHT IN A HEALTHY WAY

To build lean muscle mass, your muscles have to be put to work. That means doing exercises specifically meant to build muscle and strength. It also requires you to adjust your sports nutrition plan to include the foods and fluids to support strength training.

It's not as easy as loading up on pizza and pasta. To gain weight in a healthy way, you have to eat the right foods, at the right times. That means a combination of carbohydrate-rich foods to supply the energy you need to train harder and longer as well as protein-rich foods to supply the amino acids needed to repair the tissues that were broken down and to help build new muscle tissue.



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SEVEN TIPS FOR HEALTHY WEIGHT GAIN

To gain weight, you'll need to eat more than if you were trying to maintain your weight. Below are some sports nutrition strategies to help support your training and help you reach your weight gain goals.

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1 Try to Eat Every 3-4 Hours

Eat every 3-4 hours to help provide your body with fuel all day long, without feeling stuffed.

2 Be Consistent with Eating

Don't skip meals.

3 Include Caloric Beverages with Meals

Drink low-fat milk - white or flavored — or 100% juice with meals and snacks.

4 Sneak Calories into Meals

Make sandwiches with calorie-dense breads like sub rolls, pretzel rolls, and bagels.

5 Make Higher Calorie Smoothies

Blend Greek yogurt or milk together with fresh fruit and nut butter.

6 Carry High Calorie, Portable Snacks with You

Bring snacks to class and team meetings (trail mix, mixed nuts, etc.)

7 Eat a Nutrient Dense Snack Before Bed

Have a small snack, like crackers and cheese or a piece of fruit and a hard-boiled egg, before you head to bed.

MONITOR YOUR PROGRESS AND ADJUST YOUR PLAN ACCORDINGLY

The best way to monitor your progress is to weigh yourself weekly. If you are not making the gains that you want, first evaluate your training regimen. Remember, muscles must be put to work to grow. If you're confident in your training regimen, try to add an extra carbohydrate and protein-rich snack somewhere in the day. Then, recheck your progress after one week. Continue to increase a serving of carbohydrates at each meal until you are seeing the gains that you want. If you're not able to make the gains that you want on your own, consider reaching out to a sports dietitian, an athletic trainer or a strength and conditioning coach for help.

EXAMPLES OF QUICK, NUTRIENT-DENSE SNACKS

- Peanut Butter and Jelly on a Whole Wheat Bagel
- Ham and Cheese Sandwich with 8 oz. Low-Fat Milk
- 6" Turkey Sub Sandwich with 12 oz. Low-Fat Chocolate Milk
- ½ cup Sunflower Seeds and 8 oz. Grape Juice
- 1 cup Trail Mix (Nuts, Dried Fruit & Dried Cereal) with 8 oz. Orange Juice
- 6 Fig Bars with 8 oz. Low-Fat Chocolate Milk
- Homemade Smoothie (1 cup Vanilla Yogurt, 4 oz. Low-Fat Milk, 1 Banana, 1 cup Berries, 2 tablespoons Wheat Germ)



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