



Weight Gain

The healthy way

Gaining weight should be “simple.” Eat more calories than you expend and you’re sure to gain weight, right? Gaining weight in a healthy way, though, can be a bit more challenging due to the high energy demand of tissue building and lower calorie content of nutrient dense foods. Here are 10 steps to help you ensure that you are doing what is best for you and your body as you pursue your weight gain goals:

1. **Set attainable goals.** Our body shape and size is determined primarily by genetics and secondarily by our lifestyle. Healthy weight gain is a slow process that requires patience and realistic goal-setting.
2. **Eat breakfast.** Every day. A well balanced breakfast is an excellent way to wake up your appetite. Make sure you have a complex carbohydrate, like oatmeal or toast, along with some protein such as an egg or peanut butter, and some fruit to start your day. Try a yogurt berry parfait with granola, or a bagel sandwich with eggs & cheese and some juice. In a hurry? Grab a fruit smoothie or cereal with milk, berries, and nuts.
3. **Follow basic nutrition recommendations.** Contrary to popular belief, living on fast food, pizza, and milkshakes is not the best approach to weight gain. Although these foods can be incorporated into your meal plan, be sure to balance them with nutrient dense foods. Eat a balanced plate that is 1/3 protein, 1/3 carbohydrate, and 1/3 fruits and vegetables. Also be sure to include a source of dairy and fat with every meal for optimal calcium, flavor, satisfaction, and calories.
4. **Plan to eat 5-6 times/day, at least.** Prevent excessive fullness by eating reasonable portions spread throughout the entire day. Eat every 3-4 hours with 3-4 meals each day and several snacks.
5. **Vary your diet.** Eating the same foods every day can make it difficult to stay on track, so be adventurous and try something new. Choose a variety of complex carbohydrates such as starchy vegetables, beans, lentils, whole grains, fruits, and dairy. Start by switching up a single food group at a time such as protein: cheese, nuts, beef, fish, yogurt, pork, beans, chicken, nut butters, turkey, cottage cheese, lamb, eggs, etc.
6. **Become the friend that always has snacks.** Pack trail mix, granola bars, fruit with peanut butter, chips, dried fruit, veggies and dip, cheese and crackers, nuts, sunflower seeds, or smoothies as portable options that can help you keep up with your needs throughout the day. Cereal with milk, ice cream, and hot chocolate can be great snacks to end your day.
7. **Choose caloric beverages.** You're going to drink something, so pick fluids with calories. Juices, milk, and even an occasional soda will do the trick. Try not to fill up on water.
8. **Consider high-calorie nutritional supplements.** Energy-dense, high-quality nutrition can be hard to come by. Ensure Plus, Boost Plus, and Carnation Instant Breakfast provide quick and easy calories with the added bonus of vitamins and minerals. Fruit smoothie drinks such as Naked Juice or Bolthouse with added protein can also help you get in more energy. Consider using these products as your “nutrition medicine” on the days you’re not feeling hungry, but know you still need to eat.
9. **Balance cardio, flexibility, and strength-training exercises.** Exercise, especially cardio work-outs, burns calories that you must replace. It can also help to stimulate your appetite and ensure that you build an appropriate amount of muscle. 3-5 days of physical activity each week is optimal for most people. (Note: Severe malnutrition can require a period of inactivity as the body heals and repairs. Consultation with a medical provider and/or dietitian can help to establish a safe plan in these situations.)
10. **Get regular sleep.** Your body needs adequate rest in order to progress towards your weight gain goals. On average, most people need 8 hours of sleep/night. However, some people function well on 6 hours/night while others need 10 or more hours/night to feel fully rested. The bottom line is you should listen to your body and get the sleep you need.