Tips for Gaining Weight... 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. Here are 10 steps to help you assure that you are doing what’s best for you and your body as you pursue your weight gain goals.

1. **Set attainable goals.** Face it, very few people are destined to appear on the cover of a fitness magazine. Our body shape and size is determined primarily by genetics and secondly 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 metabolism and your appetite. Make sure you have a grain, some protein, and a 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 and berries.

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 fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and a variety of protein sources, such as meat, nuts, beans, and dairy.

4. **Plan to eat 5-6 times/ day, at least.** Prevent excessive fullness by eating reasonable portions spread throughout the entire day. Plan to have 3-4 meals each day with several snacks in between. At the end of the day, your “energy in” must be greater than your “energy out” in order to gain weight.

5. **Vary your diet, especially the protein.** Eating the same foods every day can be boring. Get creative and try something new. Start with a variety of protein sources: cheese, nuts, beef, fish, yogurt, pork, beans, chicken, yogurt, turkey, cottage cheese, lamb, eggs, etc.

6. **Pack snacks to-go for extra calories.** Trail mix, granola bars, fruit with peanut butter, chips, dried fruit, veggies and dip, cheese and crackers, nuts, smoothies, sunflower seeds, and cookies are 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 (non-diet, of course) will do the trick.

8. **Consider high-calorie nutritional supplements.** Energy-dense, high-quality nutrition can be hard to come by, but Ensure Plus, Boost Plus, and Carnation Instant Breakfast provide quick and easy calories with the added bonus of vitamins and minerals. 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 workouts, burns calories that you must replace by eating more. However, it can help to stimulate your appetite and assure that you build an appropriate amount of muscle. 3-5 days of physical activity each week can assure optimal outcomes. (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.** The human body needs adequate rest in order to “keep up.” On average, most people need ~8 hours of sleep/night. However, some people function well on 6 hours/night while others need 10+ hr/night to feel fully rested. Bottom line, listen to your body and get the sleep you need.

Please call (512) 475-8252 for more information.

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