

LEGION®

THE ONLY SUPPLEMENTS YOU NEED TO GET THE BODY YOU WANT.

THE BEST DIET AND WORKOUTS FOR "HARDGAINERS"



“I’m never going to get big!”

Thousands of self-styled hardgainers are standing in front of their mirrors right now, thinking that exact thought.

If you’re reading this article, you’ve probably done the same. And I’ve felt your pain.

You may not be able to gain size and strength as quickly as some people (genetics do matter), but I promise you: You can gain a lot muscle. You can get really strong. And it’s not nearly as complicated as you probably think.

You won’t have to drink a gallon of milk per day, live in the gym, or fill your cabinets with pills and powders, either.

THE BEST DIET FOR HARDGAINERS

Everyone knows that when it comes to gaining (or losing) weight, diet determines results more than anything else. And when it comes to gaining weight, you’ve undoubtedly heard that you have to “eat big to get big.”

Well, there’s truth in that cliché. If you’ve always struggled to gain weight, you’re probably going to have to eat more food than you’re used to.

How big is “big,” though? How many calories? How much protein? What types of foods are best? Well, let’s find out...

How Many Calories Hardgainers Should Eat

The long story short of why most people can’t gain muscle effectively is they simply don’t eat enough calories every day.

Yes, it’s that simple.

To put that in perspective, I’ve worked with quite a few hardgainer types that had to eat upward of 4,000 to 4,500 calories per day just to eke out 0.5 to 1 pound of weight gain per week.

And to lend even more perspective, their diets before working with me provided, on average, about half that amount.

You may not need to eat that much (cross your fingers because trust me — it’s not nearly as fun as it sounds), but know this: Successful “bulking” usually entails eating a slightly uncomfortable amount of food.

To understand why, let's start at the beginning: a simple definition of the word calorie.

When we're talking food, a calorie is the amount of energy required to heat one kilogram of water on degree Celsius.

Thus, when we talk about eating and burning so many calories, we're talking about consuming and expending various amounts of energy. The relationship between what we eat and burn is known as energy balance, which is the overarching principle of all dieting.

If you don't know how to get your energy balance right, you'll never achieve your health and fitness goals. Period.

You'll always struggle with your weight. You'll boggle over how to improve your body composition.

Now, when you want to gain muscle as quickly as possible, it's very important that you don't eat less energy (calories) than you burn.

When you do this, you've placed your body in what's known as a "calorie deficit" or state of "negative energy balance," and this blunts muscle growth in several ways:

- ✔ It hinders your body's ability to create muscle proteins. Your body has trouble repairing and adding to muscle tissue when in a calorie deficit.
- ✔ It causes unfavorable changes to hormone levels. Specifically, it reduces testosterone and increases cortisol levels, which further blocks your body's ability to build muscle.
- ✔ It causes workout performance to decline. When you're in a calorie deficit, you can count on eventually hitting training plateaus and struggling with dwindling energy levels in your workouts.

This is why, if you want to gain muscle and weight quickly, you need to spend as little time in a caloric deficit as possible.

Now, the best way to ensure you're not in a deficit (and thus not impairing muscle growth) is slightly overshooting your body's energy needs by eating more calories than you burn.

This is known as a “calorie surplus” or state of “positive energy balance,” and it brings us back to the “eat big to get big” bit of gymlore.

A more accurate axiom would be “you have to be in a calorie surplus to get big.”

How big of a surplus, though?

HOW BIG DO YOU REALLY HAVE TO EAT TO GET BIG?

This is where many “bulking diets” get screwy. They want you to shovel in thousands and thousands of calories, day in, day out, regardless of your circumstances.

Well, this is one way to ensure you’re in a caloric surplus, but it’s like grabbing for a chainsaw when a scalpel will do.

You see, this “dirty bulk” approach is ultimately wrongheaded because, unfortunately, a large calorie surplus isn’t more conducive to muscle growth than a small one.

That is, eating ~10 to 15% more calories than you burn every day primes your body for muscle gain just as much as eating 30% more.

In fact, the smaller surplus has the upper hand because the large one will result in a lot more fat gain (and when you’re gaining fat quickly, metabolic adaptations occur that further accelerate fat storage).

Moreover, carrying around too much body fat hinders muscle growth as well, because as you get fatter...

✔ Your insulin sensitivity declines.

As insulin sensitivity gets worse, your body’s ability to burn fat decreases, the likelihood of fat gain increases, and your body’s ability to create muscle proteins is blunted.

Maintaining a high (and healthy) insulin sensitivity is an important part of optimizing your body composition. It helps with building muscle and minimizing fat gain.

✔ Your testosterone levels drop and your estrogen levels rise.

This is more or less the exactly opposite of what you want. Testosterone is the primary hormone responsible for stimulating muscle growth and high estrogen levels promotes fat gain.

This is one of the main reasons why many fitness pundits say that bulking is an antiquated, unworkable relic of bodybuilding lore.

Unfortunately, these people are throwing the baby out with the bath water.

The wild-eyed, “eat everything in sight” approach to building muscle deserves the bum rap, but we can’t lose sight of the scientific fact that maintaining a calorie surplus is an important part of maximizing muscle and strength gain.

So, here’s how to do it right:

Maintain a slight calorie surplus of 10 to 15% to maximize muscle growth and minimize fat gain.

You’re looking to gain 0.5 to 1 pound per week, and you should see a slow and steady increase in both muscle and body fat.

Don’t pack on fat with huge cheat meals/days.

You really want to avoid bingeing when bulking because it can result in startling jumps in body fat levels. Trust me — you can nearly double your rate of fat gain by eating way too much just a couple days per week. Learn how to “cheat” intelligently, instead.

THE BEST FOODS FOR HARDGAINERS

You’ve likely heard people talk about “weight loss” and “lean muscle” foods. You know, the foods that somehow melt fat off your body or, even better, “shift” fat into muscle.

Well, I hate to be the bearer of bad news but that’s nothing but a bunch of marketing moonshine. You can’t get the body you want simply by eating the “right” foods (or avoiding the “wrong” ones).

What is true, however, is that some foods are more conducive to weight loss (or gain) than others. This is a function of...

- ✓ Caloric density
- ✓ Macronutrient breakdown
- ✓ Satiety (how full the food makes you feel)

Simply put, high-calorie foods, and especially high-fat foods, and especially those that aren't very filling, are great for gaining weight because they help you pack in the calories. And on the other hand, low-calorie foods that are quite filling are great for losing weight because they help stave off hunger and prevent overeating.

To put this practically, if you start your day at IHOP and chow down on a large stack of pancakes with butter and syrup, you can easily put down 1,000 calories in about 5 minutes. That's all good until you hear your stomach growling a couple of hours later and realize you've already eaten half of your calories for the day.

But if your breakfast consists of low-calorie, high-protein foods, you're going to feel fuller longer for a lot less calories, leaving you with plenty to spare for the rest of the day.

This brings us to one of the most common mistakes I see hardgainers making: Eating too many low-calorie, high-satiety foods.

The point isn't that you shouldn't ever eat foods like these, of course, but just that you have to eat them "sparingly" or you'll find it very hard to eat enough calories.

Here are some of my go-to bulking foods that will help you get in your calories without feeling engaged every minute of every day:

- ✓ Red meat
- ✓ Chicken
- ✓ Beans
- ✓ Eggs
- ✓ Rice
- ✓ Oatmeal (it's pretty filling, I know, but it's so delicious!)
- ✓ Cereal (I choose the "healthier" varieties)
- ✓ Whole-fat yogurt, milk, and cheese
- ✓ Pasta and bread
- ✓ Almonds, peanuts, almond butter, peanut butter



Higher-calorie fruit and vegetables like peas, banana, sweet potato, dried fruit, corn, and avocado

You can also work some high-calorie treats into your meal plans so long as most of calories come from relatively unprocessed, nutrient-rich foods. (My go-tos are chocolate and ice cream.)

Now, all this won't be enough for some people because they struggle to eat enough calories no matter what kinds of foods they choose.

A simple way to overcome this is to drink a portion of your calories.

It's very easy to put down several hundred calories' worth of tasty beverages, like fruit juice (opt for the no-sugar-added ones), milk, or rice milk, without much impacting how much solid food you can eat (semi-) comfortably.

And in the end, some guys and gals have found that just as restricting calories for fat loss can be slightly uncomfortable at times, eating a surplus of calories for weight gain can be a bit of a grind as well.

They don't feel like eating all that food but do it to get results.

THE BEST WORKOUTS FOR HARDGAINERS

I think you now understand how big of a role your diet plays in cracking your weight gain plateau. If you don't get your food intake right, nothing else will matter. Once you do, though, how you train will have a marked effect on your weight and muscle gain.

The long story short is this: As a natural weightlifter, you need to emphasize heavy, compound weightlifting and ensure you get adequate rest and recovery.

The high-rep, high-volume, high-frequency workouts that you find in magazines and all over the Internet just aren't very effective unless you're on drugs.

THE BEST SUPPLEMENTS FOR HARDGAINERS

While I like the idea of a high-calorie meal replacement shake (and am working on developing one, actually), I take umbrage with the ingredients in most weight gainers.

Namely, the junk carbs (dextrose and maltodextrin are the most popular choices), junk fats, and junk protein blends, as well as the multisyllabic tongue twisters that do who knows what in your gut. Armed with a basic pantry and fridge, you can make your own “gainer shake” that’s healthier and cheaper. Protein powder + banana + oats + peanut butter + milk = magic.

Now, one supplement that I do recommend for gaining weight is creatine.

Out of all the workout supplements on the market today, creatine stands out as one of the absolute best. It’s the most well-researched molecule in all of sports nutrition – the subject of hundreds of scientific studies – and its benefits are clear:

- ✓ It helps you build muscle faster.
- ✓ It helps you get stronger faster.
- ✓ It improves anaerobic endurance.
- ✓ It improves muscle recovery.

And the best part is it does all these things naturally and safely.

When it comes to improving body composition and workout performance, creatine is basically all pros and no cons. And when you look at the research currently available on creatine, the monohydrate form is still the best bang for your buck.

There’s absolutely no doubt about its effectiveness, it’s well tolerated, and it’s relatively inexpensive, which is why I chose it for my post-workout supplement RECHARGE.

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