

Gaining Weight Healthily

Unfortunately, gaining weight healthily is not as easy as you may think. You can't scoff burgers and chips all day long since a nutritionally balanced [diet](#) is vital for health.

People who want to gain weight need to choose sources of essential nutrients from the four main food groups, and limit those from the fifth group, since they are high in sugar and fat. Here's a description of the five food groups as defined by the Food Standards Agency and the Health Development Agency in the UK:

- **Bread, cereals and potatoes:** includes breakfast cereals, rice, pasta, noodles, yams and oats
- **Fruit and vegetables**
- **Meat, fish and alternatives:** includes tofu, eggs, nuts and beans
- **Milk and dairy products:** includes cheese and yoghurt
- **Foods containing fat and foods containing sugar:** includes crisps, sweets, butter and carbonated drinks

So how does this information translate into practical advice you can follow every day?

Carbohydrates from the bread, cereals and potatoes group need to form the basis of most meals. These foods contain rich sources of starchy carbohydrates, fibre, calcium, iron, and [B vitamins](#), and are necessary to keep your gut, bones and blood healthy. Aim to eat wholegrain, wholemeal, brown or high fibre versions of these foods whenever you can.

Most of us know that we should eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. These don't have to be fresh or organic - frozen, canned and dried versions as well as juices count towards your daily amount. Fruit and vegetables are high in fibre and are great sources of antioxidant nutrients like beta-carotene and vitamin C, which protects us from life threatening diseases like cancer and [heart disease](#).

Milk and dairy foods are excellent sources of essential nutrients like calcium, protein, and [vitamins](#) A, D and B12, and milk is an easy way to increase your calories and nutrients in one gulp. If you don't like the taste of milk, try flavouring it with a few spoonfuls of fruit flavoured yoghurt or fromage frais. Or, why not try making an old school favourite like a blancmange? Even if you're trying to gain weight, you should still choose lower fat versions of milk and dairy foods to keep saturated fat levels low (high levels of saturated fats can clog arteries and potentially lead to heart disease). Lower fat versions include skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, low fat yoghurts, Edam or half fat cheddar cheeses. Aim to include a couple of servings from this group into your daily diet. Examples include a cheese sandwich, a pot of reduced fat yoghurt or fromage frais, a glass of flavoured milk or a slice of cheese.

The main nutrients supplied by the meat, fish and alternatives group of foods include iron, protein, B vitamins, zinc and magnesium. These are crucial to maintaining healthy blood and efficient functioning of the immune system. Chose a maximum of two servings a day of meat, fish, chicken, eggs, nuts, beans and pulses. Keep high fat and high calorie choices like bacon, sausages, pates and beef burgers to a minimum. Beans and pulses like kidney, soya, haricot beans and lentils are great protein alternatives, as is tofu, which has the added bonus of being an excellent source of calcium.

Snacks during the day can be helpful, but limit foods high in fat and sugar to two servings a day.

You can also count your calorie consumption. If, for example, you consume 2000 calories per day, increase it to 2500. You should see an increase in weight of 1-2 lbs a month (any more than this is unhealthy). But avoid excesses of fats and sugars. Always maintain regular exercise. If you are not increasing weight, try consuming 3000 per day. Do not overdo this - avoid a rapid weight gain!

The actual amount of food needed to bump up your weight will vary, since each person needs a different total calorie count. Most importantly, eat according to your appetite and exercise regularly.

BMI (Body Mass Index)

To calculate your BMI, just follow these three simple steps:

1. Measure your height in metres, and square it.
2. Measure your weight in kilograms.
3. Divide (2) by (1).

BMI Categories:

- Underweight: <18.5
- Normal weight: 18.5-24.9
- Overweight: 25-30
- Obese: >30

Me: Height: 5' 6" (1.68 m)
Weight: 65 kg
BMI: **23.03**

For me, "normal" means: 53 - 84kg