

The 3 Principles of Gaining Muscle Mass

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I originally posted this on forum.bodybuilding.com, however I thought I'd make it permanent here: :)

Due to the complexity of muscle tissue, it often takes years to develop quality muscle mass. The key is to be consistent and be aware of the following principles:

Bodybuilding & body shaping are built on three factors:

1. Nutrition
2. Consistent and Intense Exercise
3. Rest

If you leave out any of those 3, your gains will be minimal.

Nutrition is the most important factor, and sadly most people neglect that part of it. I did for years when I started. The majority of people focus solely on weight training. Although weight training is a large component of adding musculature, better than average nutrition is extremely important as well. First, we'll talk about exercise.

Exercise

By going to the gym frequently, and training your muscles to the point of "momentary muscular failure", you create microscopic tearing in the muscle tissue and this stimulates them to grow, strengthen and improve. You want to hit failure at some point between the 8th and 12th rep. If you're using a weight that you can do 15 reps on before failing, the weight is too light. If you can barely get 6 reps before failing, the weight may be too heavy. As your muscles get stronger, you can add more weight to keep you in the 8-12 range. Frequently you can switch your routine so you do heavier weight with fewer repetitions, but make sure your form stays strict. Consistency is also very important. Weight training gains are analogous to pushing a car up a hill. If you stop, the car starts to roll back. Muscles only grow and improve if they're constantly stressed. When the stress stops, or stays the same, they stop improving or even shrink. Change your routine frequently, but don't take too much time off from the gym. At most a week or two if possible.

Here's a website with great information about muscle groups and the exercises that train them:

- <http://www.exrx.net/Lists/Directory.html> Nutrition

Now that you've stressed your muscles in the gym, you have to provide them with quality building materials to repair. This is where the nutrition comes in. Building muscle is like building a house. The food you eat are the bricks and mortar for building the house. If you plan out your meals in advance, eating every 2-3 hours while you're awake, and carefully monitoring your protein, carbohydrate and fat intake, you can maximize your muscle growth without gaining noticeable bodyfat. You've heard the saying "you are what you eat". What would you rather build your house with, concrete or Play-Doh?

Here are some websites that you may find useful regarding nutrition:

- <http://www.nutritiondata.com/> - Nutritional information about everything!
- <http://home.howstuffworks.com/diet.htm/printable>
- <http://www.extreme-athlete.com/buildingmuscle.htm>
- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/fun/stella9.htm> - Bodybuilder's grocery list

Creating a meal plan isn't as difficult as it seems from the outset. To set up a meal plan here's what you have to think about:

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Make a list of foods you regularly eat (including your favorite foods). Depending on your goals (gaining weight or losing weight), you may have to remove some of those "favorite" items (or reduce their quantity) when compiling your meal plan.

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Make a list of foods you wouldn't mind eating if it meant you'd be getting better nutrition. (ie. vegetables)

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Write down the times you normally eat.

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Write down the times you'd like to ideally eat (i.e. every 2 hours). Sometimes it's difficult to time a meal exactly, so give yourself a 30 minute window on either end.

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Calculate how much money you have to budget for food per week.

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Divide that number by 7 (# of days in the week) and then divide that by how many meals you eat per day. For me, each meal I eat costs a maximum of \$3.00. Some meals are significantly less than that because I prepare them myself. Therefore, it all balances out if I go out to dinner once a week and spend close to \$7-10 on one meal.

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Once you have all your lists together, plan out which foods you'll eat tomorrow, and at which times. Make sure you time your pre-workout meal for 1 hour before your workout, and your post-workout meal for immediately after your workout. Planning out your meals may require that you cook your meals the night before to take with you to work/school, or perhaps you can have a meal replacement bar instead (especially when you don't have the opportunity to sit down and have a full meal; examples of which are meetings, and between classes).

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Once you have your meals planned out, calculate the serving sizes you're planning to have, and visit <http://www.nutritiondata.com> to figure out the macronutrient and caloric values of each meal.

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Purchase a scale to measure your food (a digital one is best). Depending on the brand, they cost \$14-30 at Target (or any other kitchen supply store). This is so that you can accurately measure out your serving sizes.

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After totaling your calories, if you find you're coming up short, you can either add a meal, or increase some of your serving sizes. If you find you're taking in too many calories, or too much of one thing (like fats), remove one meal, or cut your serving sizes for one or two meals.

Those guidelines should give you an idea of how you can plan out your own meal plan so that you're consistent, and you have variety. Rest

Lastly is rest. The "builders of your house" need time to make the repairs. Not only do you have to allow at least 48-72 hours between sessions where you train the same muscle groups, but you should do your best to get a good 6-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep each night. Your body starts releasing growth hormone about 2 hours after you go to sleep. This prompts the body's systems to repair themselves. The more you sleep, the more work can be done. You ever wonder why teenagers sleep so much? It's because their bodies are growing, and the body knows it needs that "down time" to repair systems and grow. Sleep can be a powerful resource. Getting Organized

To help you organize all this, make sure you keep two journals. One for your nutrition, the other for your workouts. A simple spiral notebook will do (however if you want to be fancy, you can use a spreadsheet program on your computer). In the nutrition log, you'll keep track of the meals you eat, the times you eat them, how many grams of protein, carbs and fats each meal had, and by doing that you'll be able to know at a glance how many calories you're taking in and you can adjust it accordingly if you're planning to gain, or lose weight. The other journal will help you keep track of your workouts, poundage, exercises, # of reps per exercise, muscle groups trained, etc. This will allow you to see how you're progressing and help you avoid plateauing or having stagnant workouts.

Here's an example of what I've done. I have a profile on <http://www.fitprofile.com> and it allows me to keep track of my meals and it adds my daily totals so that I can stay on track.

- <http://www.fitprofile.com/profile.asp?id=43>

During my current "bulking" phase I'm taking in between 3000 and 3500 calories per day, and I've added an L-Arginine/L-Lysine supplement to my list of often used supplements.

- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/store/un/argine.html> - L-Arginine/L-Lysine
- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/store/opt/flax.html> - Flaxseed Oil
- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/store/met/food.html> - Big100 Meal Replacement Bars
- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/store/mt/mesobars.html> - Mesotech Meal Replacement Bars
- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/store/opt/whey.html> - Optimum Whey Protein Powder
- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/store/opt/bc.html> - Branch Chain Amino Acids (BCAA)
- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/store/opt/glutamine.html> - L-Glutamine
- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/store/opt/zma.html> - Zinc Monomethionine Aspartate
- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/store/opt/crea.html> - Creatine Monohydrate
- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/store/now/dex.html> - Dextrose

Including a high quality multivitamin/multimineral supplement each day.

- <http://www.quixtar.com/products/product.aspx?itemno=A4300>

Another resource that will help get you started is an article series written by Matt Danielson which goes into more detail regarding the concepts I've mentioned above. Matt is a professional personal trainer and he writes articles routinely for [bodybuilding.com](http://www.bodybuilding.com). His articles are particularly great for beginners or bodybuilders who've been away from the gym for a while or might be plateauing and trying to get a new routine going:

- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/fun/matt88.htm> - Beginner's Bodybuilding Program
- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/fun/matt89.htm> - Intermediate Bodybuilding Program
- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/fun/matt90.htm> - Advanced Bodybuilding Program
- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/fun/printworklog.htm> - Bodybuilding.com's Free Printable (and customizable) Workout Log

Here's also a link to a Resting Metabolic Rate Calculator so that you can determine what your maintenance caloric intake should be:

- <http://www.bodybuilding.com/fun/calrmr.htm>

Anywho, I hope all this helps. Keep on working hard. Remember, if you're like I am and are thin, we skinny guys can get big too! We just have to work a lot harder at it.

Success is easy to find. It's down the street from Discipline and around the corner from Consistency.