

PUTTING ON THE POUNDS

No, you didn't misread the title. Believe it or not, there are some people who are looking to put pounds on. They want, maybe even need, to gain weight.

Since most people spend much of their lives figuring out ways to shed their extra pounds, the concept of being underweight may be difficult to comprehend. However, if you're a part of the small population that has tried everything they can to gain weight, you know that it can be just as difficult for underweight people to add pounds as it is for overweight people to take them off.

Who needs to gain weight?

The term underweight is generally used to describe two kinds of people: those whose weight is considered below normal, but are still healthy, and those whose low weights are cause for significant health concerns.

Individuals in the former category may range from young football players who wish to create a stronger presence on the field to older adults living ordinary lives. These people usually have a genetic predisposition to thinness, and it is important that they keep this in mind when implementing strategies for gaining weight; they won't be able to change their physiology, but they may be able to enhance it.

The latter group is at high risk for respiratory diseases, tuberculosis, digestive disorders and some cancers, and underweight women are more likely to become infertile or give birth to unhealthy babies. A consultation with their physicians is recommended for these people before they embark on programs to gain weight.

Nutrition Strategies

A useful rule of thumb is that to gain 1 pound of body weight per week, you should

consume an additional 500 calories per day above the amount you typically consume.

This number varies from person to person (depending on such factors as weight and metabolism), but you get the idea: Eating more than normal is a must if you want to gain weight.

Boost your calories by consistently consuming three larger-than-normal meals a day, plus two or more snacks during the mid-morning and mid-afternoon. Try to eat foods that are high in calories, but remember to stay away from saturated fats such as cheese, beef, butter and bacon.

It's best to stick to a high-carbohydrate, low-fat diet that you modify to include larger quantities. This also applies to your intake of protein. Many athletes seeking to gain muscle use protein powders and amino-acid supplements. This isn't necessary if you eat the recommended amount of dietary protein (15 to 20% of daily calories), which is less expensive than buying supplements.

To be sure that you are sensibly increasing your caloric intake, make an appointment with a registered dietitian who can help you plan your meals.

The Key

To ensure that the extra calories you are eating don't simply turn into pounds of fat, it is crucial that you make strength training your primary form of exercise. If you rely only on eating calorie-dense foods to gain weight, you will only gain fat—probably not the change you are looking for.

Strength training will convert the extra calories you consume into muscle growth that will enhance your appearance as well as your performance in daily activities and athletics. Working with an ACE-certified Personal Trainer is a good way to learn which strength-training exercises will be best for you and to make sure that you are performing them correctly. Call 800-825-3636 or visit www.acefitness.org to locate ACE-certified Personal Trainers in your area.

Be Patient

Putting on weight can be a hard and often slow task, but if you consistently eat large meals and participate in strength training, the payoff should be worth both the wait and the work.

Additional Resource

American College of Sports Medicine Joint Position Statement—Nutrition and Athletic Performance: www.acsm-msse.org/pt/pt-core/template-journal/msse/media/1200.pdf

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at www.acefitness.org/GetFit and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts!™



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