

# A 3,000-Calorie Diet: Benefits, Weight Gain, and Meal Plan

 [healthline.com/nutrition/3000-calorie-meal-plan](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/3000-calorie-meal-plan)



## Nutrition

A 2,000-calorie diet is considered standard and meets the nutritional needs of most people.

However, depending on your activity level, body size, and goals, you may need more.

This article discusses everything you need to know about a 3,000-calorie diet, including reasons for following one, what foods to eat and limit, and a sample meal plan.

## Who should follow a 3,000-calorie diet?

Your daily calorie needs are based on several factors, including:

- **Gender.** Women generally burn 5–10% fewer calories at rest than men of the same height ([1Trusted Source](#)).
- **Age.** The number of calories you burn at rest declines with age ([2Trusted Source](#)).
- **Height.** The taller you are, the more calories you need to maintain your weight.
- **Activity.** Exercise and activities like yard work and fidgeting increase calorie needs ([3Trusted Source](#)).

Daily calorie needs range from 1,600–2,400 calories per day for adult women and 2,000–3,000 calories for adult men, with the low ends of the ranges being for sedentary people and the high ends for those who are active ([4Trusted Source](#)).

These estimates are based on equations using an average height and healthy weight for adult women and men. The reference woman is 5'4" (163 cm) tall and weighs 126 pounds (57.3 kg), whereas the reference man is 5'10" (178 cm) and weighs 154 pounds (70 kg).

Depending on your body size and activity level, you could require 3,000 calories or more per day to maintain your body weight.

Though athletes generally have higher calorie needs than the general public, people with physically demanding jobs, such as farm laborers and construction workers, may also need a high number of calories to maintain their weight.

Conversely, if you perform moderate exercise a few days per week with little activity in between, you probably don't need that many calories, as [exercise](#) burns far fewer calories than most people assume ([5Trusted Source](#), [6Trusted Source](#), [7Trusted Source](#))

#### summary

Factors like gender, age, height, and activity level influence whether you should follow a 3,000-calorie diet.

## **Can help you gain weight**

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While many people are aiming to lose weight, others are looking to gain it.

Weight gain occurs when you consistently consume more calories than you burn each day. Depending on your activity level and body size, 3,000 calories may be greater than your current calorie needs, causing you to gain weight ([8Trusted Source](#)).

## **Why you may want to gain weight**

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There are several reasons for wanting to gain weight.

If you're classified as underweight according to your body mass index (BMI), your healthcare provider or registered dietitian may recommend that you gain weight.

Alternatively, if you're an athlete, you may want to gain weight — ideally in the form of muscle mass — to perform better at your sport.

Similarly, if you're a [bodybuilder](#) or into powerlifting, you may desire to gain weight for increased muscle size and strength.

In other circumstances, you may have a health condition that increases your calorie needs, such as cancer or infection, or be recovering from major surgery ([9Trusted Source](#), [10Trusted Source](#)).

## **Safe rate of weight gain**

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While studies on the topic are scarce, an acceptable rate of weight gain is 0.5–2 pounds (0.2–0.9 kg) per week ([11](#)).

However, in people with severe undernutrition, weight gain of about 4.4 pounds (2 kg) per week has been accomplished safely ([12Trusted Source](#)).

Rapid weight gain may lead to uncomfortable side effects, such as bloating, stomach distress, and fluid retention. If you're an athlete, these side effects can hinder your performance by negatively affecting your workouts or practices ([13Trusted Source](#)).

What's more, rapid weight gain can increase your triglyceride levels, which may raise your risk of heart disease ([14Trusted Source](#), [15Trusted Source](#)).

How fast you gain weight depends on how many calories you need to maintain your weight.

If you maintain your weight on 2,000 calories per day, you will gain weight much quicker on a 3,000-calorie diet than someone who maintains their weight on 2,500 calories per day.

For example, one 8-week study showed that when 25 healthy people ate an additional 950 calories over their weight-maintenance calorie needs, they gained an average of 11.7 pounds (5.3 kg) — 7.7 pounds (3.5 kg) of which was fat ([16Trusted Source](#)).

If those same participants ate only 500 calories above their maintenance calorie needs for the same duration, they would likely gain much less weight.

#### summary

For some people, a 3,000-calorie may help you gain weight. An acceptable, safe rate of weight gain is 0.5–2 pounds (0.2–0.9 kg) per week.

## HEALTHLINE RESOURCES

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Let Healthline's team of nutritionists recommend snacks based on your dietary restrictions and food preferences

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## **How to follow a healthy 3,000-calorie diet**

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The calories in your diet come from three macronutrients — carbs, fat, and protein.

Protein and carbs provide four calories per gram, compared with nine for fat.

The Acceptable Macronutrient Distribution Ranges (AMDRs) set forth by the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies recommend that people get ([17](#)):

- 45–65% of their calories from carbs
- 20–35% of their calories from fat
- 10–35% of their calories from protein

The chart below applies these percentages to a 3,000-calorie diet:

<b>Calories</b>	3,000
<b>Carbs</b>	338–488 grams
<b>Fat</b>	67–117 grams
<b>Protein</b>	75–263 grams

When combined with resistance training, protein intakes on the higher end of the AMDR have been shown to reduce body fat gain due to excess calorie intake and increase muscle mass ([18Trusted Source](#), [19Trusted Source](#), [20Trusted Source](#)).

Resistance training can promote muscle gain instead of fat gain on a high-calorie diet ([21Trusted Source](#)).

Consume protein around your workouts, as well as equally spaced throughout your day to enhance muscle recovery and growth ([22Trusted Source](#), [23Trusted Source](#)).

#### summary

Higher protein intakes combined with resistance training can help optimize your body composition.

## **Foods to eat, foods to avoid**

Consuming 3,000 calories per day from whole, unprocessed or minimally processed foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats, and lean proteins, can be challenging.

That's because these foods contain many nutrients but relatively few calories, requiring you to eat a much larger volume of food.

Conversely, it would be relatively easy to consume 3,000 calories from highly processed refined foods, such as bacon, potato chips, candies, cookies, sweetened cereals, and sugary drinks, as they're highly palatable and packed with calories.

Yet, because these junk foods lack important nutrients for health, it's vital to get most of your calories from nutritious whole foods, including:

- **Animal-based proteins:** salmon, chicken, turkey, bison, whole eggs, and lean cuts of beef, such as flank or sirloin steak
- **Plant-based proteins:** tofu, edamame, tempeh, peas, and chickpeas
- **Grains:** oats, rice, breads, pastas, and quinoa
- **Dairy:** milk, cottage cheese, kefir, and Greek yogurt.
- **Fats and oils:** almonds, walnuts, flax seeds, olive oil, and nut butters like natural peanut or almond butter
- **Fruits:** avocados, berries, apples, bananas, pears, oranges, grapes, etc.

- **Vegetables:** squash, sweet potatoes, peas, kale, peppers, zucchini, broccoli, tomatoes, cauliflower, etc.

Plus, protein powders, including whey, casein, and plant-based powders like rice, soy, or pea, can be added to smoothies for a nutrient- and calorie-packed snack.

Lastly, mass gainer supplements, which often provide 1,000 calories per serving, are a convenient option, but it's best to meet your calorie and nutrient needs through diet first.

Highly-processed, nutrient-poor foods to avoid or limit on a 3,000-calorie diet include:

- **Fried foods:** French fries, onion rings, doughnuts, chicken strips, cheese sticks, etc.
- **Fast food:** tacos, burgers, pizza, hot dogs, etc.
- **Sugary foods and drinks:** soda, candy, sports drinks, sugary baked goods, sweetened tea, ice cream, sweet coffee drinks, etc.
- **Refined carbs:** cookies, chips, sugary cereals, pastries, etc.

If most of your diet consists of whole, nutrient-dense foods, you can enjoy your favorite treats in moderation.

#### summary

Make sure most of your calories come from minimally-processed, nutrient-dense foods and reserve sweets and junk foods for the occasional treat.

## Sample menu

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Here's what 5 days on a 3,000-calorie diet may look like.

### Monday

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- **Breakfast:** 1 cup (80 grams) of oats with 1 cup (240 ml) of dairy or plant-based milk, 1 sliced banana, and 2 tablespoons (33 grams) of peanut butter
- **Snack:** trail mix made with 1 cup (80 grams) of dry cereal, 1/4 cup (30 grams) of granola, 1/4 cup (34 grams) of dried fruit, and 20 nuts
- **Lunch:** 1 cup (100 grams) of spaghetti with 3/4 cups (183 grams) of tomato sauce and 4 ounces (112 grams) of cooked ground beef, as well as 1 medium breadstick with 1 tablespoon (14 grams) of butter
- **Snack:** 1 cup (226 grams) of cottage cheese and 1/2 cup (70 grams) of blueberries
- **Dinner:** 4 ounces (110 grams) of salmon, 1 cup (100 grams) of brown rice, and 5 asparagus spears

### Tuesday

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- **Breakfast:** smoothie made with 2 cups (480 ml) of dairy or plant-based milk, 1 cup (227 grams) of yogurt, 1 cup (140 grams) of blueberries, and 2 tablespoons (33 grams) of almond butter
- **Snack:** 1 granola bar, 1 piece of fruit, and 2 pieces of string cheese

- **Lunch:** 12-inch sub sandwich with meat, cheese, and veggies with 3 ounces (85 grams) of baby carrots, 2 tablespoons (28 grams) of hummus, and apple slices on the side
- **Snack:** 1 scoop of whey protein powder mixed in 1 cup (240 ml) of dairy or plant-based milk
- **Dinner:** 4-ounce (113-gram) sirloin steak, 1 medium-sized (173-gram) baked potato with 1 tablespoon (14 grams) of butter, and 1 cup (85 grams) of broccoli

## Wednesday

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- **Breakfast:** 3 whole-wheat waffles with 2 tablespoons (33 grams) of peanut butter, 1 orange, and 2 cups (480 ml) of dairy or plant-based milk
- **Snack:** 1 nut-based granola bar and 1 ounce (28 grams) of almonds
- **Lunch:** 6-ounce (170-gram) 90%-lean burger on a whole-wheat bun with 1 tomato slice and lettuce leaf, as well as 1 1/2 cup (86 grams) of homemade sweet potato fries cooked in olive oil
- **Snack:** 1 cup (227 grams) of Greek yogurt and 1 cup (140 grams) of strawberries
- **Dinner:** 4-ounce (112-gram) chicken breast, 1/2 cup (84 grams) of quinoa, and 1 1/3 cups (85 grams) of sugar snap peas

## Thursday

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- **Breakfast:** 3-egg omelet with sliced onions, red and green bell peppers, and 1/4 cup (28 grams) of shredded cheese with 2 cups (480 ml) of dairy or plant-based milk to drink
- **Snack:** 2 tablespoons (33 grams) of peanut butter and 1 banana on 1 slice of whole-wheat bread
- **Lunch:** 8 ounces (226 grams) of tilapia fillets, 1/4 cup (32 grams) of lentils, and a salad topped with 1/4 cup (30 grams) of walnuts
- **Snack:** 2 sliced, hard-boiled eggs atop a mixed green salad
- **Dinner:** turkey chili made with a 4-ounce (114-gram) turkey breast, chopped onions, garlic, celery, and sweet peppers, 1/2 cup (123 grams) of canned, diced tomatoes, and 1/2 cup (120 grams) of cannellini beans, topped with 1/4 cup (28 grams) of shredded cheese. Add oregano, bay leaves, chili powder, and cumin as desired for taste.

## Friday

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- **Breakfast:** 3 whole eggs, 1 apple, and 1 cup (80 grams) of oatmeal made with 1 cup (240 ml) of dairy or plant-based milk
- **Snack:** 1 cup (226 grams) of plain yogurt with 1/4 cup (30 grams) of granola and 1/2 cup (70 grams) of raspberries
- **Lunch:** 6-ounce (168-gram) chicken breast, 1 medium-sized (151-gram) sweet potato, 3/4 cup (85 grams) of green beans, and 1 ounce (28 grams) of nuts
- **Snack:** 1/2 cup (130 grams) of chickpeas atop greens

- **Dinner:** burrito bowl with 6 ounces (170 grams) of chopped sirloin steak, 1/2 cup (130 grams) of black beans, 1/2 cup (90 grams) of brown rice, 1 cup (35 grams) of shredded lettuce and spinach, and 2 tablespoons (16 grams) of salsa

#### summary

This 3,000-calorie, 5-day sample menu includes a variety of nutrient-dense foods, such as lean proteins, healthy fats, fruits, and vegetables.

## **The bottom line**

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Depending on several factors, including your activity level and body size, a 3,000-calorie diet may help you maintain or gain weight.

Whole, unprocessed or minimally processed foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats, and lean proteins should make up the majority — if not all — of your diet.

On the other hand, highly processed refined foods like bacon, potato chips, candies, cookies, sweetened cereals, and sugary drinks should be limited.

## **Meal Prep: Chicken and Veggie Mix and Match**

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Meal Prep: Chicken and Veggie Mix and Match

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Last medically reviewed on August 29, 2019

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