

How many calories should I eat to gain muscle?

This is one of the most common questions beginners will ask themselves when [starting out on their fitness journey](#). And it's an important one, too. Your calorie count is by far the most important aspect of your [muscle building diet](#). Unless you supply your body with the necessary means for a good recovery, it won't be able to get any stronger and bigger.

Unfortunately, you will never see any serious gains if you aren't consuming enough calories. Our bodies need proper nourishment for the maintenance of our bones, tissues and then some more for muscle growth. This means the only way you can bring your body to build more muscle tissue is by running a calorie surplus (given you [exercise](#), of course), which translates to taking in more calories than your body burns throughout the day.

What's The Optimal Calorie Surplus?

Obviously, the larger your calorie surplus the quicker you'll gain weight. In theory you could gain several pounds per week, if only you ate enough. Unfortunately, there is a limit to the calories the human body can put towards building muscle tissue. Consume more calories than that and you won't speed up muscle growth but will definitely get fatter.

So in theory you would want your calorie surplus to be large enough to provide plenty of energy for muscle growth, but no additional calories to gain unnecessary fat. Sadly, in practice this is almost impossible and unless you have crazy genetics, you will always gain some extra fat. Your goal will then be to minimize fat gains, while maximizing muscle gains.

Here are the two most important steps to calculating your optimal calorie surplus:

1. Calculate your Total Daily Energy Expenditure (TDEE)
2. Add 10-20% of additional calories to your TDEE

Step 1: How To Calculate your Total Daily Energy Expenditure (TDEE)

Your Total Daily Energy Expenditure (TDEE) is the amount of calories that your body burns in one day. It is calculated by estimating how many calories you burn while resting (= Basal Metabolic Rate or BMR) and adding a certain amount of calories on top, depending on how often you exercise.

The simplest method of calculating your total daily energy expenditure (TDEE) is by using a TDEE Calculator such as [this](#) one. It will ask you for your age, weight, height and weekly exercise. While the result will not be 100% accurate - since we all have different metabolisms and BMRs - it will give you a good idea of how many calories you need to consume in order to maintain you current weight.

In case the abbreviations used by many TDEE calculators confused you, here is an explanation of the most common ones:

BMR: Basal Metabolic Rate, which describes the amount of calories your body burns while resting (= with no activity)

TEF: Thermic Effect of Food, which describes the amount of calories burned while digesting any kind of food you ate

NEAT: Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis, which describes the amount of calories burned during all activity but exercise

TEA: Thermic Effect of Activity , which describes the amount of calories burned when exercising

Step 2: Adding 10-20% Of Additional Calories To Your TDEE

Now that you have calculated your TDEE, you want to know how many calories you need to add to hit your optimal calorie surplus. This part is probably the most controversial part of any weight gaining / [bulking diet](#).

Some people will tell you to "lean bulk", adding only around 10% of additional calories to your TDEE to avoid gaining any unnecessary fat in the process. This is what I talked about earlier. However, sometimes when introducing a calorie surplus your metabolism will speed up and erase such a tiny surplus. There is no one-size-fits-all solution here and you have to narrow in on *your* optimal calorie surplus over time.

So how do you do that?

Based on what we know about the ideal rate of weight gain when building muscle (more on that later), your optimal calorie surplus will lie anywhere between 10-20% above your TDEE. That means you should shoot for one of the two values and make any necessary adjustments if you feel you are gaining too much or too little weight.

If you are a skinny guy, start with a larger calorie surplus (around 20%) and lower it if you are gaining too much fat.

If you have a normal metabolism or used to be overweight, start with a smaller calorie surplus (around 10%) and raise it if you aren't gaining enough weight.

How do you know you are gaining weight at the ideal rate?

How fast you can gain muscle depends on several factors, most notably your [workout](#), your [diet plan](#) and your genetic predisposition. While you may see noticeable results after your first weeks of training, for most people, substantial results will take a few months.

Beginners, training under [optimal conditions](#), can expect to

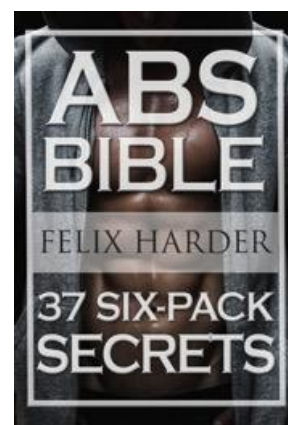
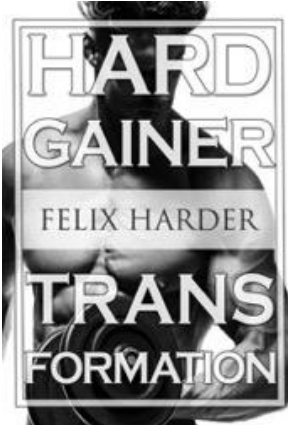
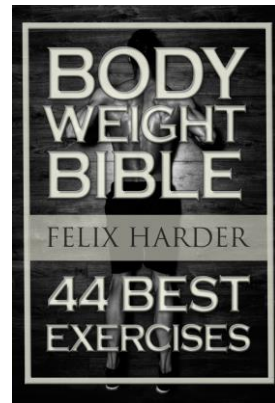
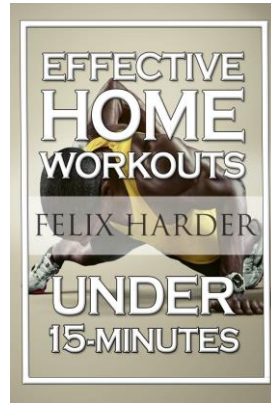
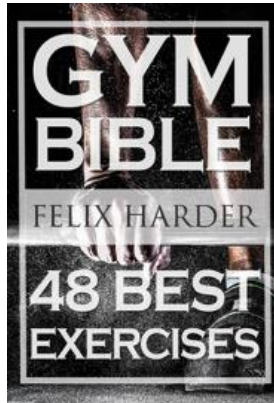
build around 2 pounds of muscle mass per month (women around half of that). That's 0.5 pounds per week. Now, your due to the inevitable fat gains, your overall weight will increase by more than 0.5 pounds per week, but it shouldn't be more than 1 pound per week (probably less than that).

With this in mind, weight yourself at least once a week. Raise or lower your calorie count depending if you are below or above the ideal rate of weight gain. That's pretty much it. As long as you keep exercising, [set clear goals](#) and use [progressive overload](#) to your advantage, you will definitely build muscle.

How Many Calories Should I Eat To Gain Muscle - Summary:

- Our bodies need proper nourishment for the maintenance of our bones, tissues and then some more for muscle growth. Running a calorie surplus is essential to building muscle tissue
- The optimal calorie surplus will minimize fat gains, while maximizing muscle gains
- First calculate your Total Daily Energy Expenditure (TDEE), then add 10-20% of additional calories on top
- If you are a skinny guy, you can probably handle a larger calorie surplus (>15%). People with slower metabolisms should start with a lower surplus (around 10%)
- Adjust your diet according to the ideal rate of weight gain

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