

Ectomorph Diet: Food List, Sample Menu, Benefits, More

If you'd categorize yourself as tall, thin, or lanky, you might be an ectomorph. It's one of the three main body types (along with endomorph and mesomorph), which some experts say can provide the framework of your ideal diet and exercise plan.

What Is an Ectomorph?

If you can handle a spaghetti or pizza dinner with no ill effects, you may be an ectomorph. That's because these individuals tend to handle carbohydrates the best out of any body type, say proponents of the body type diet. "Ectomorphs naturally have a higher insulin sensitivity to process carbs," says Phil Catudal, a personal trainer and coauthor of *Just Your Type: The Ultimate Guide to Eating and Training Right for Your Body Type*.

But ectomorphs lack muscle mass, so they need to amp up their protein intake and combine it with a strength training plan, argue proponents of this approach. Catudal says the ideal diet for an ectomorph is one that is higher in carbs (45 percent of calories) and protein (35 percent of calories) and lower in fat (20 percent of calories).

How the Body Type Diet Works and How to Know if You're an Ectomorph

You may also categorize yourself as an ectomorph if you know you don't gain weight easily. "These are the tall, thin people in the gym, and they're often male. They're trying to put on muscle and get stronger," says Nanci Guest, PhD, RD, a nutritional scientist and personal trainer in Toronto. Yet she's quick to point out that it's usually not a matter of your specific body type, but rather, it's probably genetics. "We have genes that determine if you have a faster or slower metabolism," she says. And it's these

metabolism-revving genes that are mostly responsible for a thin body frame.

You might also find that you can “eat whatever you want” and not gain weight — something that sounds ideal in theory, but an unhealthy diet can have an effect on your health no matter your weight or body mass index (BMI).

Ectomorph Hybrid Types

Over time, says Catudal, ectomorphs can become one of the common hybrid types, an “ecto-endomorph,” characterized by long limbs but a bigger belly from a sedentary lifestyle and less than stellar eating habits.

As you age, that state of “skinny fat” — a term for people who are normal weight but have excess fat mass — can catch up to your long-term health. A study from 2018 found that having low lean body mass (muscle) and excess fat was associated with a greater risk of developing cognitive problems.

Which Popular Diets May Work Best for Ectomorphs

Lower-fat diets may feel like the stuff of the past, but they can work well for ectomorphs, including a vegan or vegetarian diet (that’s filled with plenty of plant-based proteins). One diet that Catudal recommends against is the very high fat and low-carb ketogenic (keto) diet, “Particularly if your goal is to lose belly fat, a keto diet may increase [physical] stress, which will just prompt your body to hold onto excess weight,” he says.

Food List for an Ectomorph

Ectomorphs tend to respond well to carbohydrates, so you can eat those freely. You’ll just want to choose healthy sources, including fiber-rich

fruits, veggies, and whole grains. To optimize your health, reach for plenty of protein, including from lean animal sources and plants like nuts and seeds. Prioritizing protein (along with strength training) will help with your muscle-building efforts.

Here are some of the foods you can eat on the ectomorph diet:

Meat and Fish

- Chicken
- Turkey
- White fish (cod, mah-mahi)
- Seafood (shrimp, scallops)
- Eggs
- Lean steak or beef

Dairy

- Fat-free or low-fat yogurt or milk (keep to 1 serving a day)

Fruits and Vegetables

- Berries
- Mango
- Oranges
- Apples
- Pears
- Banana
- Cauliflower
- Green beans

- Broccoli
- Asparagus
- Brussels sprouts
- Squash

Nuts and Seeds

- Almonds
- Pistachios
- Peanuts
- Sunflower seeds
- Pumpkin seeds

Grains and Starchy Vegetables

- Whole-wheat bread
- Old-fashioned or steel-cut oats
- Brown rice
- Quinoa
- Farro
- Sweet potato

A 7-Day Sample Menu for the Ectomorph Body Type

Day 1

Breakfast Old-fashioned or steel-cut oatmeal topped with strawberries and walnuts

Snack Hard-boiled egg and soy milk latte

Lunch Mediterranean quinoa salad with chopped veggies and olive oil

Snack Apple and almonds

Dinner Turkey and mango tacos wrapped in lettuce leaves served with a side of black beans

Day 2

Breakfast Smoothie made with fruit, almond milk, and protein powder

Snack Trail mix made with nuts and dried fruit

Lunch Avocado toast topped with a fried egg, side salad

Snack Carrots and black bean dip

Dinner Sliced flank steak fajitas with onions and peppers wrapped in sprouted whole-grain tortillas

Day 3

Breakfast Sweet potato toast topped with a thin smear of nut butter and turkey bacon

Snack Pear with mixed nuts

Lunch Bean and veggie burger served on a whole-grain bun, side of steamed broccoli

Snack Protein bar

Dinner Grilled chicken, sautéed kale, tomato and cucumber salad, side of farro

Day 4

Breakfast Whole-grain toast with fat-free or low-fat Greek yogurt and a sliced pear

Snack Protein bar

Lunch Mixed greens salad with chopped vegetables, roasted turkey, and vinaigrette

Snack Apple and a slice of cheese

Dinner Chicken and mushroom stir-fry over brown rice

Day 5

Breakfast Slice of veggie frittata with roasted sweet potatoes

Snack Banana with almond butter

Lunch Tuna mashed with avocado on whole grain crackers, side salad

Snack Protein bar

Dinner Quinoa bake made with tomato sauce, mixed vegetables, and chicken

Day 6

Breakfast Fat-free or low-free Greek yogurt parfait with chopped apples, walnuts, whole-grain cereal, and cinnamon

Snack Small smoothie with protein powder

Lunch Turkey chili and a side salad with vinaigrette

Snack Sliced veggies dipped in homemade guacamole

Dinner Grilled shrimp and vegetables kabobs on a bed of quinoa

Day 7

Breakfast Overnight oats made with fat-free or low-fat yogurt, almond milk, and topped with raspberries

Snack Hard-boiled egg, piece of fruit

Lunch Turkey sandwich on whole-grain bread, mashed avocado, lettuce, tomato, onion, baby carrots on the side

Snack Broccoli dipped in hummus

Dinner Roasted cod, Brussels sprouts, baked sweet potato

Advantages of the Ectomorph Diet

Compared to the eating plans for mesomorphs and endomorphs, the ectomorph diet is higher in carbs. So if you're averse to low-carb diets, you may find this eating plan meshes well with your tastes — and that's great, so long as you eat carbs in moderation. Thanks to your higher metabolism and body's ability to process carbs, you're likely able to eat carb-heavy dishes like pasta without as much risk as the other body types, says Catudal.

Yet as the ectomorph diet advises, by increasing the amount of protein you eat per day and combining it with weight training recommendations (below), you'll stimulate your body to build more muscle.

Not only does an increase in muscle mass boost your metabolism, but it can also protect your bones as you age. As research published in 2019 noted, losing muscle mass was linked to 2.5-fold greater odds of osteoporosis.

Disadvantages of the Ectomorph Diet

You'll need to make sure you're eating enough protein (100 to 150 grams per day) in order to build muscle and tone up, says Catudal. And it may feel counterintuitive to snack on tuna or hard boiled eggs in the afternoon if your go-to before was crackers or an apple.

That said, if you're a hybrid ectomorph and carrying excess fat around your waist, a higher-carb diet might not be the right match for you, says Melina Jampolis, MD, an internist and board-certified physician nutrition specialist in Valley Village, California. "Many patients who have been thin their whole lives gain weight in their belly," she says. In that case, limiting high-starch choices like pasta and bread in favor of sweet potatoes, oats, and beans may be advised, according to the thinking behind the body type diet. "The good news," she suggests, "is that this body tends to respond very quickly to cutting carbs, and they can lose weight efficiently," she says.

Still, keep in mind that there's no one perfect diet for everyone. And if weight loss is what you're after, another diet plan, such as one that limits calories instead of carbs, can help you reach your goal.

Furthermore, the body type diet does not have rigorous scientific research supporting its use; therefore, there's no proof it will result in weight loss or any health benefits.

Ectomorph Workout: Which Exercises Are Best for This Body Type?

"The rule for ectomorphs is weight lifting," says Catudal, but if you tend to gravitate toward cardio, he suggests leaning into that desire by pairing it with body weight movements. Perform circuit workouts (such as pushups, squats, or jumping jacks) twice a week along with weight workouts that use dumbbells or machines (using a challenging weight) three times a week, he recommends.

