

How to Build Muscle

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Are you looking to grow muscle mass and burn calories more efficiently? It doesn't happen overnight (as any bodybuilder can tell you) but you'll be well on your way to adding muscle mass to your frame as you follow these steps consistently.

Part 1 of 3: Diet

1 Increase your caloric consumption. For example, if you are currently consuming 2,000 calories a day, boost that to about 2,500 calories or even more. But make sure that you're eating clean, and are not eating too much.

2 Get enough protein to support muscle growth. Aim for between 1-1.8 grams of protein per kilogram of bodyweight. For example, if you weigh 180lb, take in at least 81-146g—or about 2.8-5oz—of protein every day.

3 Drink enough water. The body needs a sufficient amount of water to build muscle at an optimal rate. Here's a great little formula to help make sure you are getting enough: Body weight in lbs X 0.6 = water intake in ounces.

4 Eat regularly. Rather than having two or three large meals during the day—something we've grown up with—change your eating habits so that you are eating five or six smaller meals during the day.

- To help keep your protein intake high, one or two of those meals can be a protein shake. Here's one example, though a quick Internet search will uncover hundreds of delicious protein shakes:
- 8oz skimmed milk
- 1 banana
- 1 tbsp peanut butter
- 2 scoops of protein powder

5 Eat fat. That's right—not only does it make food taste good, fat is good for you, as long as you are eating the right kinds and amounts of fat! Saturated fats—the fat you'll find in a stick of butter, a bag of chips, or bacon—should be limited to about 20g or less. That's the bad news. The good news is that unsaturated fats are actually beneficial, even necessary. Fat is necessary for the proper distribution of vitamins A, D, E, and K, helps promote better eyesight, and healthy skin. Depending on your total caloric intake, 50-70g of monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fat is beneficial for your training, and your overall general health.

- Monounsaturated fats can be found in olive, canola, and sesame oils; avocado; and nuts such as almonds, cashews, peanuts, and pistachios.
- Polyunsaturated fats are found in corn, cottonseed, and safflower oils; sunflower seeds and oils; flaxseed and flaxseed oil; soybeans and soybean oil.
- Omega-3 fats, an overall winner of a fat that is very beneficial to heart and blood

health, eyesight, and for children, brain development. You'll find this fat in many omega-3-enriched foods. Another great source is fatty cold-water fish such as salmon, tuna, trout, and sardines.

- A good way to determine how much fat in grams you should be taking in is to multiply your calorie intake by 0.001 for maximum trans-fats; by 0.008 for maximum saturated fats; and by 0.03 for the "good fats". For example, for a 2,500-calorie diet, you would limit trans-fats to 3g or less, saturated fats to 20g or less, and up to 75g of mono- and polyunsaturated fats.

6 Take your vitamins. In addition to a well-balanced diet, include a multivitamin supplement to your dietary regimen. It will ensure that your body is getting the full amount of vitamins and minerals it needs to stay healthy. There are many options, depending on your age, your sex, and your particular health and diet needs. Find the one that's right for you, and make it part of your daily routine.

Part 2 of 3: Exercise Guidelines

1 A good diet is required for your body to be able to maximize your potential, but there's no potential at all until you start the process of tearing down your old muscles and rebuilding them bigger, bulkier, and stronger. The best way to do that is to start at the beginning.

2 Warm up. Before you begin any exercise routine, whether it is a simple jog, or a 300lb dead-lift, start with a low intensity routine designed to warm up all the muscles you're about to work on. Not only will it help you get into the right frame of mind, it can help prevent injuries.

- You should never stretch a cold muscle. Research has shown that pre-workout stretching, contrary to public opinion, does not prevent injury and may in fact result in poorer performance. Stretching is best done following a workout.

3 Work harder, but shorter. Training with high reps is good for building endurance, but it won't help you build up either size or strength. Instead, aim for about 3-8 per muscle group, and 6-12 reps per set for your normal routine. Your final rep should be very hard to complete! If it's not, increase the weight you're lifting.

- Limit your overall training to about 45 minutes a day.
- Every 4-6 weeks, vary your routine. As your body adapts to stress, you'll hit a plateau where the benefits of weight training will begin to diminish. The only way to prevent this from happening is to change things up, such as by increasing weight and changing exercises. Try a week of really piling the weights on, and do two to four reps at the maximum weight you can manage with proper form.

4 Work your whole body. You'll see maximum benefit when your entire body is part of the routine. The more muscles you use when training, the more hormones you will produce (including epinephrine and norepinephrine), which in turn stimulates muscle growth both while you exercise and for the entire day.

- Give all muscle groups equal attention, such as five sets of rows after five sets of bench presses. This will encourage balanced training, growth, and flexibility.
- Compound exercises such as squats, dead-lifts, presses, rows, and pull-ups

use a lot of different muscles.

- You can work the entire body in each session, or divide your sessions between, for example, the upper body one day, and the lower body the next.
- Don't rush. Advanced lifters often base their routines around a technique called *explosive repetition*. In other words, they lift a tremendous amount of weight in a short (explosive) amount of time. There are significant benefits to this method, but the risk of injury in novice athletes is high. It is recommended solely for more advanced athletes.

5 Limit your cardio training. While doing cardio is great for fat burning, it can limit muscle growth by burning up glycogen and amino acids. If you must keep cardio as part of your fitness plan, try sprint intervals: one minute at an all-out sprint, followed by two minutes of light jogging. Do this for no more than a half an hour, three times a week. If you play sports, eat even more food to make up for lost calories.

6 Get your rest. Your body needs time to recover, and to repair (build) your muscles, and to do that you will need at least 7 or 8 hours of sleep a night. Avoid caffeine and alcohol for deeper sleep.

- In addition to the proper amount of sleep, do not overdo your training regimen. While you might be tempted to think that "more is better," in fact the opposite is true. You can reach a point known as "over-training", in which you'll lose the ability to "pump", (engorge the muscles with oxygen-rich blood), and can even lead to muscle wasting—exactly the opposite of what you are trying to achieve. Here are some symptoms to be aware of if you think you may be falling into the over-training zone:
 - Chronic fatigue
 - Strength loss
 - Loss of appetite
 - Insomnia
 - Depression
 - Lowered sex drive
 - Chronic soreness
 - Prone to injury
- To avoid over-training, set up a schedule that works for you and your goals. Here is an example for a split routine that gives you plenty of time on to break down your muscles, and plenty of time off to let them recover, even larger than before:
 - Day 1: Chest and biceps, followed by 30 minutes of high-intensity cardio.
 - Day 2: Legs, triceps, and abs, followed by 30 minutes of high-intensity cardio.
 - Day 3: Shoulders and back, followed by 30 minutes of high-intensity cardio.
 - Day 4: Chest, biceps, and abs.
 - Day 5 - Day 7, rest.

7 Lower your stress levels. Whether your stress comes from job, home, or just the way you're wired, do what you can to reduce or eliminate it. It's not just good for you in general, but stress increases the production of the hormone *cortisol*, a hormone that encourages your body to store fat and burn muscle tissue.

Part 3 of 3: Specific Muscle Exercises

1 Target your pecs with chest exercises. The **bench-press** is the most dependable way to gain chest muscle, although there are lots of different exercises for the chest.

- Do **push-ups**. Combine push-ups with other chest exercises, or do them independently. Keep your arms at shoulder-width when you lower yourself down. The closer your hands are to one another, the more you'll work your triceps.
- For the **bench-press**, start with a weight that you can lift comfortably. If you are a beginner, try lifting the bar along with 5lbs or 10lbs on each side. With arms at shoulder-width apart, grab onto the bar and slowly lower the bar until it's about to touch the bottom of your chest; push up explosively until your arms are fully extended upwards. Do 8-10 repetitions (reps) like this for three sets (3 x 8), adding additional weight each set.
- Lift weights on the **incline** bench press. The incline is like the bench press, but the bench is slightly elevated at about 40 degrees. Do 3 x 8. It will be harder to lift the bar on an incline, so start out with less weight than you would on the bench-press.

2 Target your triceps with arm exercises. Dips are probably the most effective way to work your triceps, which is the muscle beneath your biceps. You'll need to have strong triceps to bench-press large amounts of weight.

- To do **dips**, place your hands at shoulder-width apart on a bench, with your body and feet stretched out in front of the bench. Slowly bend your elbows and lower your body down so that your butt nearly touches the floor. Lift back up with your arms to starting position; repeat, doing 3 x 20.
- Alternately, you can do a **chest dip** on a dip machine, grabbing hold of two beams, bending your feet back off the ground, and lowering your body until your knees nearly touch the ground. Lift back up with your arms until they are locked.
- Do **skull crushers**. Lay down flat on a bench with a bar. Bend your elbows so that the bar is about a couple inches from your forehead. Slowly push the bar up until your arms are fully extended before bringing the weight back down. Keep your elbows close together. Repeat 3 x 8.
- Do **overhead dumbbell press**. Take a dumbbell and carefully lift it over your head so that your forearms, gripping the dumbbell, are horizontal behind you. Lift your forearms into vertical position above your head, taking care not to hit your head with the dumbbell. Keep your elbows close together. 3 x 8.

3 Target your biceps with arm exercises. Dumbbell arm curls are probably the most effective way to improve strength in your biceps. As with all exercises, build muscle by steadily increasing the weight you lift.

- Do individual **arm curls** with dumbbells. Sit down on a bench and grab onto a dumbbell on the ground, with your hand in between your thighs. Using your thigh as a fulcrum, lift the dumbbell all the way to the upper chest by curling your arm upward. Switch to the opposite hand and repeat. 3 x 8.
- Do **arm curls** on a weighted bar. Standing up, grab hold of a weighted bar with both hands. Let the arms extend all the way down to the thighs. Using only your arms, lift the weight up to your chest by curling your arms upward. 3 x 8.
- Do **pull-ups**. Jump onto or grab hold of a horizontal bar that is comfortably taller than you. Lift your legs back so that you are hanging from the bar. With your hands shoulder-width apart, and your palms facing toward you, lift your chin up to the bar using only your arms. 2 x 8.

4 Work your quads and hamstrings with squats. Squats are the go-to exercise for building muscle in your legs. Here are three different kinds of squats that will work different parts of your leg muscles.

- Do *standard squats* with a weighted bar. Place enough weight on a bar and rack it so that it's a little lower than shoulder-height. It should be heavy enough that doing a squat is difficult, but not impossible. If you're a beginner, this may mean using a bar without any weight to start with. Duck under the bar and come up so that the bar fits comfortably between your shoulder blades. Your knees should be slightly bent. Lift the bar up off the rack and move backwards one step. Your legs should be slightly wider than shoulder-length.
 - Slowly bring the weight down by bending your knees. Keep your hips under the bar.
 - Arch your back slightly but keep your torso erect.
 - Bring your butt down as far as you can, keeping the tension on the leg muscles.
 - Exhale deeply and use your legs and hips, not your back, to lift out of the squat. 3 x 10.
- Do *front squats* with a weighted bar. Rack a weighted bar at just-below shoulder-level. Come up to the bar from the front, positioning the bar on the front shoulders. Cross your arms over onto the bar and walk it out. Keeping your back straight, bend your legs into a squat, with your hips under the bar. Explode upward and repeat. 3 x 10.
- Do *Belgian squats* with a dumbbell. Hold out in front of your chest a dumbbell using both hands. Standing in front of a bench, lift your right leg back so that it's parallel to the floor and resting comfortably on the bench. Bend into a squat using the left leg, so that the right knee almost hits the floor. Explode upward. 3 x 8. Repeat using opposite leg.

5 Target your abdominal muscles with crunches and core exercises. Your abs define the muscles on your stomach, giving you that chiseled 6-pack look. There are a variety of exercises that work out your abdominals. Here are a couple.

- Do *standard/oblique crunches*. Lie down on a mat and position both arms behind your head without locking the hands. Bend your knees so that your feet are flat on the ground. Pushing the small of your back into the ground, slowly roll your shoulders off the ground only a couple of inches (not all the way to your feet). Don't use your momentum to help you up; use slow, regulated movements. Repeat 3 x 20.
 - For oblique crunches, tilt your torso to one side as you lift your shoulders off the ground. Alternate sides after each crunch.
- Do *planks* to work the abs and the core. Lie face-down on the floor. Lift yourself up so that your body is still parallel to the floor, with your forearms (flat on the floor) and your toes supporting your weight. Keep your body straight and hold your position for as long as possible.

Questions and Answers

How can I build muscle as a teenager?

The biggest mistake among young would-be bodybuilders is overdoing it, followed by not learning the proper techniques. Take those breaks and follow the correct form, or you'll give your body stress and injuries instead of muscle. Also make sure you're getting a large but balanced diet. Teens going through growth spurts need lots of food, especially when they're working out.

How can I get six pack abs?

There are a thousand approaches to abs, most of them based on myths. Stability ball crunches are a good choice, since you're forced to use your core muscles for balance as well as lift. Training your hip flexors and obliques are good if you're going for general fitness, but they're not your best bet for a picture-perfect six pack.

What if I don't have any of the exercise equipment?

There are plenty of exercises you can do with nothing but a flat space, a bench, and something to use as a dumbbell. Try a can of food or a full metal water bottle for that last one.

Will drinking raw eggs help build muscle?

Eggs are a good protein source, but cook them before eating. You'll actually digest much more of the protein from a cooked egg, and you'll avoid the (small) risk of salmonella.

Don't see your question? Ask it here:

What do you need to know? We'll do our best to find the answer.

Submit

Give us 3 minutes of knowledge!

Yes

No

Yes

No

Yes

No

Yes

No

Tips

- To continue building more muscle, increase the amount of weight that you're lifting over time.
- Drink water instead of soda, it will help with losing weight.
- Weight training, circuit training and strength training are great ways to start the build up.
- Eat clean and frequently, lifting weights lowers the bodies defense system as it repairs the torn muscles, vitamins are therefore vital to boost the immune system. Lift heavy, rest often.
- Variation on front squat, perform a power clean and do a full front squat and repeat, 5 x 5s work well as an alternate to 3x8s, 5 rep sets help avoid failure which tells your brain not to try to contract that muscle group as hard the next time you try.
- Right form is very important and it's no use of piling up more weight if form is wrong. Many guys often lose form while exercising back and biceps. It causes back pain and even the muscle is not properly trained.
- Rest is just as important as lifting, take a minute breather between sets.
- Train with something to distract you from giving up. For example, a

friend or music to do it with.

- Voluminous oats, low fat protein, nut butters, and flax to boost hormone precursors. Do not skip meals or eat less, it is way better to eat 5 small meals a day than 3 big ones. Breakfast > Lunch > Dinner is the healthiest!
- If you're watching television, do quick workouts when the commercials come on.

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Warnings

- If you are a beginner, start with lighter weights because if you try to lift heavier weight you can hurt yourself.
- As you gain muscle, your metabolism will regulate itself like a thermostat in an effort to sustain some sort of equilibrium in body weight. You may have to raise your calories a second time to maintain the weight gains.
- Don't be intimidated or make assumptions when you see someone using a different amount of weight than you. They may be on a program in which they are doing fewer reps with more weight, or vice versa. Building muscle has nothing to do with how much someone else is lifting, it has to do with how much you're challenging yourself.

Sources and Citations

- [Men's Fitness](#)
- [WebMD—Fats](#)
- [WebMD—stress](#)
- [University of New Mexico—hormones and exercise](#)

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