

AJAC Guide to Lean Mass Gain: Eating for Muscle Growth

Oh to go back in time...

When I first began lifting, I knew nothing about nutrition, and I did not bother learning, I did what many dumb bros do...I justified that I didn't need to learn anything because I'd magically get results from training, and nutrition could not be THAT important.

Consequently, my weight gain was a series of stops and starts as I'd never eat enough, didn't know what I should really be eating, would binge out constantly, would learn some small snippet of information that I'd not understand properly, and this pattern continued.

I attribute many early injuries and plateaus I had to poor nutrition; being dehydrated, not eating enough to fully recover, not consuming enough protein so on and so forth.

Despite this, I still made GAINS. But the process was not nearly as smooth as it could have been

When I started lifting, I weighed 160lbs. I assumed at 170lbs, I'd be RIPPED



and BUFF.

I was about 16 at the time.

Then I got to 170lbs...and I didnt look that different. My arms and shoulders had more definition, but I was not big and brawny.

By this point I was 17.

This pattern repeated for 175..180...185...190...

It was not until I reached 200lbs that I visibly looked “fit” and looked like I lifted weights when people saw me.

And by that time I was 21. 40lbs of muscle in 6 years in pretty good “gains”...but those gains could have come in HALF the time had I eaten enough protein and not been constantly undereating.

And at 6’2 in height...200lbs is not that big. I realized to be HUGE I’d have to weigh around 240-250lbs.

And genetically that was not in the cards, not unless I utilized anabolics.

Since my early 20s, I’ve spent many many many hours studying nutrition. I discovered the Weston Price Foundation around 2010, and that was the



“redpill” of my mindset towards nutrition.

Along with the book and articles I’ve read, the most valuable insights have been gleaned from reading bodybuilding lore. Studying what Silver Age and Golden Age bodybuilders ate and how they trained will teach much more practical knowledge than most any science minded article will.

This guide, like my other guides, is light on jargon, zero on “studies” and packed with pragmatic application. I am a new age disciple of the “old school” of training, in that I believe in learning through application and personal study of what works for one’s self. If you want to get into the SCIENCE and geek out on it...cool. I'm not “anti-science”, and most of what I'm sharing here is scientifically supported, but I also don’t see the point in writing an entire guide with 100 citations simply to prove basic points that the Spartans in 500BC figured out.

Gaining muscle mass means gaining weight. That means the scale goes up.

There is no arguing against this. If you want to be bigger, you will WEIGH MORE. That is how that works.

Is it possible to gain muscle and strength, and get leaner?



It sure is, but that's also context dependent. It depends on your genetics and your training and where you are right now with bodycomposition.

Some guys lift high volume and high frequency, and they actually gain more muscle relative to fat and their bodyfat % goes down.

Some guys lift this way for the first time, and they put on muscle mass, and they don't seem to gain any fat at all.

Some guys lift, and they gain fat and muscle equally, and they have to cut later on.

Some guys need to eat like machines and they get tired of eating and gaining weight is difficult.

There are too many variables and too much variety amongst people's individual responses for me to give any "just do THIS" prescription.

My hope is that in reading this guide, you will learn what to do by way of ACTION and self-study to your own results.

Lets begin.

Chapter 1-Bodytype, what you Need to Know

Your bodytype goes beyond what you look like. Your physical characteristics give you information into your metabolism, hormones, and nervous characteristics.

This is called somatotypes.

There are three

-Ectomorph

-Endomorph

-Mesomorph

Somatotypes have a contentious history, as their origins are pseudoscientific, but at the same time, it is undeniable that they are quite accurate in describing the differences in bodytype between people.

These are not hard and fast categories, but general categories. It's uncommon you encounter a person that fits the exact characteristics of a category.

But it's also true that most people will fit into one of the categories.

Some men find gaining muscle very easy, but they also gain fat and struggle to get lean. Other men might have average muscle building genetics, but they can get ripped in 12 weeks and it's not that difficult.

Or you might have someone that is a "freak" with a large skeleton, gains muscle readily, AND has very low bodyfat (anyone that has ever worked with power athletes has likely seen this)

The basics of Somatotypes come down to four basic characteristics

- The size of your skeleton (small, medium, or large framed)
- Your propensity for muscle growth (hard gainer, average genetics, or freak genetics)
- Your propensity for fat gain (naturally low bodyfat, average bodyfat, or naturally higher bodyfat)
- Your muscle fiber composition: mesomorphs and endos are often fast twitch dominant and very explosive, while ectos are slow twitch dominant and excel at endurance activities.

Those are the factors; skeleton size, muscle growth, nervous system, and bodyfat composition.

Now let's look at each individual category.

Ectomorphs

Ectos are thinner in appearance, having medium to small bone structure and often characterized as “lanky” or simply flat out skinny.

These people typically favor endurance sports, and being “big and strong” is definitely NOT their strong point.

They can have fast metabolisms, but are sometimes light eaters, and it's difficult for them to put on weight. They are not naturally strong, and they are never going to be. For muscle growth, they tend to respond best to moderate to high rep ranges, and are better off with shorter resistance training workouts than longer ones (it gives them more time to recover).

Ectos are the people who can handle A LOT of carbohydrates.

The suggested macro split for these individuals is around 50-60% carbs, 20-30% protein, and 20-30% fat (obviously the percentages shift depending on how you adjust the others)

If this is you, you need to be in a 500 calorie surplus, and eat like it's your job. Small meals, 5-6 times a day. Get the meals in.

To note, don't get psycho with the math. This diet basically breaks down to

Carbs first, protein second, fat third.

Mesomorphs

Meso are usually characterized by having great musclebuilding genetics, but they are something of the median point between ectos and mesos.

They have medium to large bone structure, athletic frames, and they are the “natural” athletes that like being active, can build muscle readily, and generally enjoy anything physical.

They are the people who like to play sports, and depending on their particular genes, they may be very big and strong, or more agile and explosive.

“Pure Mesos” are extremely muscular, and they can do practically any kind of resistance program and see results. The most athletic can barely touch weights, and they’ll still be amazing athletes.

Mesos tend to be the type that everyone wishes they could be. Mesos are naturally lean, never fat, and they usually have healthy appetites.

They tend to like protein a lot, and the suggested macro split for them is a mixed one

30-40% carbohydrate, 30-40% protein, and 30% fat.

To note again, don't get psycho with the math. This diet basically breaks down to

Carbs or Protein first, protein or carbs second, fat third.

Endomorphs

Endos have larger bone structure (in some cases considerably larger), and they naturally carry more muscle and fat mass because of their frame. Think of athletes like Strongmen, Football lineman, and powerlifters. All BIG people, with a lot of muscle, but definitely not ripped/lean.

Endos have nervous systems that favor explosive movement and they can be brutally strong, but they also tend to HATE endurance anything, and they are not naturally active.

On the plus side, gaining muscle and strength is easy so long as they lift and eat. On the downside, fat loss can be absolute hell, and their bodies seemingly are built to NOT ever be ripped. Unlike Ectos or mesos, who if you feed them extra food they get more active, Endos are opposite.

The more they eat, the more sluggish they become. They can be both incredibly athletic while also being incredibly slow moving most of the time.

As they naturally tend to store fat easily anyways, dieting can suck for these people, as they already have to deal with naturally having a higher appetite.

Endomorphs are the type that need low carb diet, and they best split for them is around 40% protein, 40% fat, 20% carbs

Once again, don't be an autistic with the math. Protein, Fat, and not many carbs, in that order.

Chapter 2-What Should You Be Eating?

This applies to everyone. I want you eating WHOLE FOODS. And I don't mean shopping at whole foods, I mean whole, unprocessed food in its natural state (or as close to it as possible)

For Protein

- Eggs and egg whites
- Dairy products (IF you can digest them)
- Fish (tuna, salmon, tilapia, etc)
- Chicken
- Turkey
- Beef, steaks, ground beef
- Deli meat (turkey, roast beef, ham)
- Whey protein powder

- Any Seafood (shrimp, scallops)

For Carbohydrates

- Rice
- Potatoes
- Oatmeal
- Starchy vegetables (corn, peas, potatoes, sweet potatoes)
- Fruits can be using sparingly
- Green vegetables are not really a carb source, but can be healthy to include in the diet regardless

For Fats Sources

- Healthy oils (Olive, Coconut, Avocado, Walnut, Peanut)
- Ghee
- Avocados
- Nuts/nut butters
- Fatty cuts meats
- Eggs

CONTEXT is what matters with nutrition, not there being a magic formula. If you eat a solid 3-6 meals a day of the above foods and have a protein shake before or after training, muscle growth should NOT be a problem, unless you simply need to eat more food. In which case you'd increase your meals,

snacking, and do so consistently.

Finding out the best foods for yourself is a trial & error process. The best criteria to adhere to:

-How does it digest?

-How does your energy feel after eating it?

-How does it come out the other end when you defecate?

Those three questions will tell you everything you need to know about your food choices.

Chapter 3-General Models to Follow

Taking bodytype into context, along with current bodycomposition, there are three general models for weight to use

1. The Traditional Model

If you are reasonably lean in, set your calorie surplus at 500 per day, and get your surplus from carbohydrates. If this is too much, and you gain more fat than you like, than dial it down lower. If it's not enough, go higher

2. The “Lean Gains Models”

This is for slower weight gain but also avoids unwanted fat gain. In this model, you simply eat in a smaller surplus of about 200 calories per day. You can elect to get this extra protein (this is basically an additional protein shake), or carbohydrates. I'd suggest trying the carbs first, and then switching to protein if that leads to more fat gain than you would like.

3. The “See Food” Hardgainer Model

This is for those men who struggle to gain weight at all. If weight gain is VERY difficult for you, you need to follow the “SeeFood” diet. That means you eat 5-6 meals daily, and you constantly try to increase the volume of food. This requires eating ONLY foods that you can digest very easily, and not eating anything at all that slows down your digestion. Start with small meals that are easy to consume, and every two weeks, increase the volume of food in one of the meals. Over many weeks, the volume of food you consume will go higher and higher, until eventually you'll be eating double what you were before.

Whatever model you follow, do it with discipline. Do not complain you're not gaining muscle, and then tell me you're only eating twice a day and you THINK you're getting enough protein in. EAT MORE

Should You Even Be Attempting to Gain Weight?

I need to make this point before we go any further: If you are over 15% bodyfat right now, your focus should NOT be on weight gain. You should be working on LOSING Bodyfat.

That does NOT mean not to lift weights, or not to eat high protein, or not to focus on getting stronger.

You absolutely need to be eating enough protein, lifting, and focusing on strength gains.

Especially if you are very fat, recomposition is entirely possible if you eat at Caloric MAINTENANCE, you keep carbs low, and you watch the pounds drop off steadily with time. (but this is not a fat loss guide, read the AJAC Diet for the recommendations on Fat loss)

Mass Gain cannot be prioritized until you are at a healthy level of bodyfat. Until that point comes, fat loss comes first.

Chapter 4-Day to Day Discipline

1. Set a schedule, and follow the schedule

The biggest mistake in trying to gain weight is inconsistency. If you are always eating at different times, and follow no kind of set schedule, you cannot expect muscle gain to be a reliable process.

You should eat at the same time every day, and not deviate from this. Whether it's 3 meals, 4 meals, or 6 meals, space them out at reasonable intervals, and follow your schedule.

2. Eat the same meals and over again

Flat out, I don't care if you don't know how to cook. There are 100,000 youtube videos of bodybuilders preparing their food. Stop being helpless.

You don't need massive variety in your meals.

Protein source, carb source, throw in a smattering of vegetables if you want.

You can change the flavor by changing the seasoning. Eating the same foods allows for easy meal planning and consistency.

3. Eat frequent meals

It is what works best for muscle gain. At least at least 3 times a day, preferably 4-6 if possible. This can be divided into smaller and larger meals

4. Protein Intake

If you do NOTHING else, follow the rule of 1 gram per pound of muscle. Muscles are made from protein. This simple fact holds back numerous people from improved bodycomposition. If eating enough protein is difficult, use protein powder ([I get my protein powder from Truenutrition. Use code AJAC235 for 5% off.](#))

5. Consume enough healthy fat

Your fat should come from your PROTEIN sources. Do not be eating dry chicken breasts and 96/4 beef.

Get the regular versions of meat that have fat. Around 20-40% of your calories should come from fat. Fat can come from animal protein, plant sources, and even fish oil.

6. Consume enough carbs

Your diet can be anywhere from 20% all the way to 60% carbs depending on how active you are, and depending on your bodytype. Follow the guidelines in the bodytype nutrition section for determining carbohydrates

8. Stay properly hydrated at all times

Drink at least half your bodyweight in fluid ounces of water daily. Muscles are mostly water, and being dehydrated during training is not a good thing.

Chapter 5-Bodyweight and Scale Weight

Tracking visual progress requires objectivity. You can look at yourself in the mirror each day, but if you want to be fully objective, take PICTURES. I know everyone reading this has a camera on their phone.

Taking a daily picture upon getting out of bed will provide clear evidence of how your physique is changing week to week.

Along with pictures, weigh yourself each day. Aim for a 1lb weight increase each week. If you're not gaining weight, increase the amount of food you are eating by eating more at each meal, or adding in an additional meal.

And keep in mind, Muscle growth is not as fast as anyone thinks.

The growth rate of actual muscle fiber is SLOW, and many of the size gains people associate with training come from increased sarcoplasmic hypertrophy (your muscles hold more fluid in them, NOT a bad thing, good thing) versus literal muscle fiber increases in size (myofibrillar hypertrophy, also a good thing). So long as you are not in a calorie deficit, and are eating enough protein and overall calories, you will gain muscle.

En Summa

Muscle gain is a gradual process, and getting progressively bigger requires both progressive training and disciplined eating. Divorce yourself from the idea that you will ever get HUGE in a short amount of time (that won't happen without anabolic assistance). Commit to the long game and visualize 6 month, 1 year, and 5 year goals of what you want your body to look like and be capable of.

Recommended Resources



[Alan Aragon's Research Review](#)

[3DMJ Natural Bodybuilding](#)

[Roguehealth by Dennis Mangan](#)