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How to gain weight? ^[1]

Hi Alice,

I am a 22-year-old male. I would like your advice as to how to increase my weight. I am extremely thin, and would like to put on weight for both appearance and strength purposes.

I believe that thin people have a very fast metabolic rate. Is there any way of slowing this rate down? Does it fall naturally with age? I have often been told that I should lift weights, but cannot find time on a regular basis to do so. I do, however, have time to do push-ups at home.

Anyway, I'd much appreciate it if you could give me guidelines as to how to increase weight, especially through diet. What kinds of food should I be eating? How many times a day should I eat? How big should the meals be? I hear the soybean is very nutritious — is this true; if so, what could I eat or drink that contains soy?

— Fatty and Skinny?

Answer

Dear Fatty and Skinny,

While society often makes individuals feel pressured to lose weight, there can also be pressures for some to gain weight to fit a socially constructed ideal. All that to say, Fatty and Skinny, before you jump into making changes to your life, it might help to do a little self-exploration.

Understanding why you want to gain weight may help you determine the types of changes (if any at all) you'd want to make in terms of the types of food you'd eat, how frequently you'd eat, and the size of your meals. Are you also hoping to gain weight for health reasons? Is there a certain look you're hoping to have? Are you hoping for strength to go about your daily activities more easily or to be able to lift a certain amount of weight? You're correct that metabolic rate may affect how someone gains or loses weight. While age may slow it down, there are other factors that may speed it up or slow it down (more on this in a bit). Additionally, the soybean can be nutritious. It can be consumed in many forms, but generally, the less processed it is (such as in its raw form, tofu, tempeh, or soy milk), the more nutrients it'll have. As you consider all of this, it's worth noting that changing your weight may take considerable time and energy so it's good to think about how this plan will fit into your life.

You seem to be on the right track in terms of what you can do yourself to gain weight. To gain weight, the goal is to consume more calories than you burn each day. The types of food you eat and physical activity you engage in can contribute to your ability to gain weight. When eating, it's good to eat more frequently throughout the day and focus on foods that provide nutrients, such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and lean protein sources. A good way to add to your daily nutrients, while also adding calories, is to try smoothies or shakes that are made with fruits and vegetables. Some people may even choose to add protein sources such as powders or nut butters. Another recommendation is to minimize liquid consumption before a meal or snack so you're able to fill up on foods that tend to have more nutrients and calories. If you would like some guidance on the best ways to gain weight through your eating patterns, consider meeting with a registered dietitian. Your school may have someone on-campus or you can visit the [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#) [2] website to find one near you.

In terms of physical activity, the reason people suggest strength training is because it has a tendency to add muscle mass. If you're not sure how to lift or have concerns about fitting training into your schedule, you may want to meet with a personal trainer to learn the basics. Many gyms and fitness centers offer personal training sessions. If you're in school, the on-campus fitness center may offer these sessions at a discount for students. You could also see if your school offers strength training classes — you may be able to get academic credit and work towards your personal goals in a way that's easier to fit into your schedule!

Your assumption about metabolism also playing a role is correct. A person's basal metabolism represents the minimum energy expended to keep a resting, awake, body alive. The energy used in basal metabolism depends primarily on lean body mass. Other factors that influence your basal metabolism include: the amount of body surface a person has, sex assigned at birth, body temperature, thyroid hormone levels, age, pregnancy, caffeine and tobacco use, and how much food a person consumes, among others. That being said, there may be medical causes that make it difficult to gain weight. If you haven't already, you may find it helpful to speak with a health care provider to explore whether or not trouble gaining weight is associated with any health concerns.

As you embark on this journey, it's good to remember that anyone undertaking a weight changing venture can expect body composition and size to change *gradually*. With some patience, discipline, and continued reassessment of your goals hopefully you'll be able to embrace your body, no matter the size.

Alice!

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