

Minimalist Muscle

More Muscle In Less Time For Busy Guys

by Eric Bach



Module Three: Minimalist Muscle
Hardgainer Nutrition Guide

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Ask your physician for a complete physical examination, especially if you high cholesterol, high blood pressure, are overweight, or have diabetes.

Discuss all dietary changes with your physician or a registered dietician.

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Do not take risks beyond your level of experience and abilities.

Don't lift heavy weights if you're alone, injured, fatigued, and inexperienced. Ask for instruction and a spotter for lifts to maximize safety. If you experience lightheadedness, dizziness, or shortness of breath while exercising, stop immediately and consult a physician.

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Introduction

Dieting: The most important factor in looking better naked.

Forget what you've heard about dieting. There is no magic pill or diet to lose weight or build muscle. There are no "bad macros" like carbs. And there is no magical combination of butter, coffee, and oil that will turn you into Superman.

But there are thousands of diets that will help you change your body. Intermittent fasting, Paleo, Atkins, the Mediterranean Diet can all work.

The key to all of them?

Calories, or energy balance.

To lose weight: burn more calories than you consume.

To maintain body weight: match the calories you're eating with the calories you're burning.

To build muscle: consume more calories than you're burning. And exercise right.

Pretty simple, right?

My most successful clients track their calories. As the saying goes: "If you're not assessing', you're guessing." Tracking calories is the best way to hold yourself accountable.

There is one major benefit to tracking calories: Awareness.

Without tracking, it's easy to under or overeat without realizing it. And while counting calories is an imperfect science, it's still an important way to change your body.

For example, the difference between $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of almonds and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of almonds (a full palm versus half a palm) is 180 calories. That's enough to push you well over your calories for a day. If you made that misjudgement every day for a year, that's 65,700 calories. Yowza.

On to some key concepts.

Macros, Micros, and Water

These are the basics. Without these nailed down, all the “fancy” diets you read about in magazines are pointless.

Macros: Macros are the calorie containing portions of food. They include protein, carbs, and fat.

Protein: Each gram of protein contains 4 calories. Protein is essential for getting' swole, building muscle and most tissues throughout the body. Protein sources include: lean red meat like beef and bison, poultry, and fish.

Carbs: Each gram of carbs also contains 4 calories. No, carbs aren't evil. Carbs are ideal for high-intensity training like sprints, lifting weights, and are the most readily available for of energy for your brain and muscles. Starchy carbs include white and sweet potatoes, rice, oatmeal, and squash.

Fats: Each gram of fat contains 9 calories.. Fats are vital for hormone production and many physiological processes. You need carbs to look, feel, and perform your best. (And stay alive, which is pretty important!) fats include avocados, raw nuts, and by extension of being an animal, meats like chicken, beef, and fish.

Micronutrients: These are vitamins and minerals that help optimize every physiological function in your body. By eating a well-rounded diet of fruits, starches, veggies, lean protein and nuts, you'll cover most of your bases.

Water: Drink 1/2 an ounce per pound of bodyweight per day. That means if you weight 150 lbs, drink 75 oz of water, or about 9 standard glasses. Proper hydration is essential for every aspect of performance. Carry a typical water bottle with you and finish it every two hours.

Food Quality: It's easy to focus on just nailing calories. And for some, that goes a long way. But in the long-term, food quality is damn important if you want to optimize your health and performance. And build a badass body!

Eat a variety of produce and starches for training. Get a few healthy fats. Eat grassfed meats when you can. And drink plenty of water. Enjoy the occasional cheat day, but keep the junk food for special occasions, like Football Sundays, or Birthday Bourbon.

Meal Frequency and Meal Timing

No need to over-complicate meal timing and frequency.

Six meals per day works. So does one or two meals per day.

Pick whatever eating style fits your lifestyle and allows you to consistently hit the calories you need for your goal.

That's what matters, not whether you eat four times or skip breakfast.

Focus on high-quality foods and getting the calories you need for your goals.

Eat for the body you want and track your food. The tracking it doesn't have to be daily. But it's essential to understanding the foods you're putting into your body.

And always remember:

Simplicity is the key to success. Don't get lost in fancy, empty promises.

Eating for Muscle Growth

You'll need to refine your diet and training to build muscle.

Without a caloric surplus, your body won't grow.

Still, that's not a reason to hop on the "See-Food" diet and regularly crush seven containers of Ben and Jerry's Half-Baked....even though it's tempting.

Focus on building lean, dense muscle. Eat a small surplus of calories, rather than going wild and adding tons of fat.

That sounds better, right?

Today, I'll show you how.

The Basics of a Muscle Building Diet

Unless you're a skinny beginner, get lean before trying to build muscle. The leaner you are when you start building muscle, the less fat gain you'll gain.

For men, body fat should be between 12-16 % (almost outlined abs.) For women, body fat should be about 20%.

Get an idea of where you are, [here](#).

You need to eat more calories than you're taking in to build muscle.

That means if you've been trying to build muscle and haven't succeeded, you still need to eat more. There's no magic formula; calories are king.

And to lock in your muscle gain, you need to do two things:

1. Track your nutrition with an app like MyFitnessPal. (Just get it done, folks.)
2. Calculate how many calories you'll need for sweet, sweet #gainz.

Calculating Your Macros

Take your bodyweight in pounds (lbs) x18.

An active 180 lb male (3 weight workouts, 1-2 conditioning workouts per week) would calculate as follows:

$180 \times 18 = 3,240$ calories per day.

Body Weight in lbs x18

For Example: 180 lb male= 3240 calories

30% protein = $3240 \times .3 = 972$ calories / 4 calories/gram = 243g/day

40% carbs = $3240 \times .5 = 1,296$ calories / 4 calories/gram = 324g/day

(Rice, potatoes, and oatmeal galore!)

30% fat = $3240 \times .3 = 972$ calories / 9 calories/gram =108g/day

So, a 180 lb male would eat:

3240 calories

243 g of protein

324 g carbs

108 g Fat

These macros are not set in stone, but I find most lifters do well with a 30/40/30 split between protein, carbs, and fat.

Three Basic Rules:

(1) Always have 1g/protein per pound of goal weight. Thus, if you're 180 lbs and want to weigh 190, get at least 190 grams of protein.

(2) Don't take fat below 20%. Doing so can negatively impact hormone levels. Yikes!

(3) Carbs are KEY. Despite the claims, carbs are not even. Load up on rice, potatoes, quinoa, and other carb sources for muscle growth. Carbs the ideal food source for muscle growth--take them as high as 50%.

Overall: Make hitting your calories and protein totals the top goal. Manipulate carbs and fat based on your food preference, but maintain a balanced diet.

And remember: food choices matter. Eat the best quality food you can afford.

Making Nutritional Adjustments

Calorie counting is always an approximation. Since we're all unique with a different metabolism, body weight, and activity level, these calories aren't ideal for every person. So here's the kicker: you need to test and assess. Each week, monitor your bodyweight and waist.

Is the scale moving in the right direction? Perfect, stay the course. If you're developing a spare tire, first look at your food quality. Are you wasting calories on unhealthy junk, like soda? Cut that first and replace it with water and a healthier calorie source like rice.

If your weight isn't going up, increase your calories by 150 per day, primarily from carbs. That's nothing crazy. It means adding another potato during dinner, or a piece of fruit as a snack.

Remember: your body can only build a limited amount of muscle per day. Jacking your calories up by 500+ when the scale isn't budging is a sure-fire way to get fat, not jacked. *The sweet spot is roughly 300-400 calories above your maintenance level.*

As your weight gradually increases, stay consistent and disciplined. You'll need to adjust your calories every 2-4 weeks as weight increases to continuously build lean muscle. Ideally, you'll be building .5-1 lb of lean muscle per week. That's fantastic progress for any lifter.

Six Essential Hardgainer Nutrition Habits

For some dudes building muscle is easy. Add protein and creatine to their diet mixed with any training and voila: *10 pounds of muscle in a month.*

You're probably not that guy.

And neither was I. No matter how hard I trained or what I thought I ate, I still ended up in skinny jeans and small t-shirts. It sucked.

That all changed one hot, muggy afternoon.

I just got done peeling myself off the turf at high school football practice after I was absolutely trucked by a teammate. My teammate wasn't a prick; I just provided less resistance than a blade of grass.

It was embarrassing, humiliating, and a huge wake up call to change.

I read everything on nutrition and training I could. And then I tried to implement it all at once.

Still, I failed miserably. My desire to change was so great that I changed everything whenever I read a fancy supplement label with giant promises or a new training routine.

WHEN IT COMES TO BUILDING MUSCLE, INFORMATION OVERLOAD IS A SUREFIRE WAY TO FAIL.

Much like a Hail Mary pass, your efforts will probably end up with a turnover and failure. It's much better to dink and dunk your way down the field. Taking what you can and creating small wins on a daily basis until you spark a big play.

Another analogy, this one from weight room. You wouldn't jump into heavy singles without first building up and practicing technique with heavy loads. Nutrition for hardgainers is no different. It's time to stop being the object of ridicule despite busting your ass. By implementing these hardgainer nutrition laws one at a time you'll earn your pass out of hardgainer hell.

1) Drink Liquid Meals Before, During, and/or After Your Training

Want to lose weight? One of the first things you should change is your liquid intake. Incorporate liquid calories before, during, and/or after training. The benefits are huge.

Since you're already guzzling fluids to rehydrate during workouts it's easy to sneak in 500+ calories for improved exercise recovery, protein synthesis, and tissue repair.

WHAT YOU NEED:

- **Blender** because, well, you need to blend the damn thing
- **Fruit** for flavor, high quality nutrients, and carbohydrates for energy
- **Spinach or Greens.** You won't even taste it and the added veggies are vital to balance a high-protein diet
- **Protein** to support muscle growth and tissue repair
- **Topper/texture-adder** such as shredded coconut for additional nutrients and to bring the whole recipe together
- **Optional:** Creatine monohydrate to support high performance training, or a greens supplement to fill nutritional gaps.

RASPBERRY CHOCOLATE GOODNESS

This shake is an awesome post-workout shake, quick breakfast, or a healthy sweet treat option. If you are looking for fat loss keep this decadent treat for a post-workout treat due to the carbohydrate count.

Ingredients

- 1 Cup Raspberries (frozen)

- 2 Scoops Chocolate Whey Protein
- 1.5 Cups Raw Spinach
- 1 Cup Coconut Milk
- ½ cup water, ½ cup ice

Bottom Line: Supplements make things much easier. If you're busy, then \$2 for two scoops of protein per day is a no-brainer compared to cooking up an extra half pound of chicken for an equivalent amount of protein. From both a financial and time perspective, protein supplements are a godsend. Make a batch of Super Shakes like the shake listed above.

2) Track Your Calories For Self-Awareness

Tracking calories is a pain in the ass.

Tracking calories is an inexact science at best.

Still, if you're not gaining weight the reason is simple. You're not getting enough calories. As mentioned earlier, multiply your bodyweight by 18 to find the minimum number of calories you need.

Therefore, if you weigh 160 pounds... $160 \times 18 = 2,880$ calories

Thermogenics are simple. If you're in a caloric surplus you will begin adding weight to your hard gainer frame. When it comes to "energy out," the body's energy needs include the amount of energy required for maintenance at rest, physical activity and movement, plus food digestion, absorption, and transport.

“Energy in” is simpler: how many calories you’re putting into your body. Altogether, *you need to put in 300-500 more calories* than you’re burning for a positive energy balance.

How to Create a Positive Energy Balance:

Build muscle with weight training. Here are the recommendations I gave to *T-Nation* readers.

- Create muscle damage with intense weight training
- Try consuming more shakes and liquids with calories
- Build in energy dense foods that don’t cause rapid satiety (nut butters, nuts, trail mix, oils, etc.)
- Eat more frequently
- Take advantage of workout nutrition with additional shakes before, during, and after exercise

SERIOUSLY: EAT MORE!

If you’re not gaining weight but want to, the hard truth is you need to eat more. All the training in the world won’t do anything for you if you’re not putting enough fuel into your body. You need tons of fuel to support your hard training and even more to build muscle. You can’t build a brick wall without bricks. Get your calories in.

Bottom Line: The science is inexact, but self-awareness is priceless. The biggest most jacked guys in the world count their calories because it instills *self-awareness and discipline* on exactly what it takes to accomplish your goal. Count calories using Myfitnesspal for the

next two weeks and monitor your weight every other day. This way you'll see the amount of food needed to reach your goals and *develop* eating habits that match your goals.

3) Don't Fast If You Want to Gain Muscle

I understand the draw of intermittent fasting for fat loss, overall health, and working around a hectic schedule.

But a restricted eating schedule is the last thing under-eating hardgainers need if they want to gain muscle.

Hardgainers find it hard to eat four cups of rice and 16 oz of steak at dinner. They think a chicken breast and one sweet potato is eating big.

While you don't need to eat every two or three hours or drag a cooler to work, you must make time to get your calories in. If you're dead-set on intermittent fasting for muscle gain, don't go over 12 hours without eating. You won't get enough calories in to support muscle growth.

Bottom Line: It doesn't matter how many bricklayers you have. If there aren't enough bricks you won't be able to build a foundation. The same logic applies to building muscle. *All your the training is for naught unless you eat enough calories to support muscle growth.*

4) Balance Acids and Bases

Look, bones: You're crushing your diet, training hard, and making headway in your escape from hardgainer hell. Problem is, *you reek like a toxic dump*, your stomach is in fits, and your digestion is garbage.

What gives?

Digestive health is huge indicator of what's going on side your body while you're preoccupied with pumping your pecs and squatting a house. When muscle building is the goal, hardgainers opt for high-protein foods like tasty dead animal flesh to support their hard training. The tradeoff is on imbalance between having too many highly acidic foods (meats) and not enough bases (leafy greens.)

This results in symptoms that include increased inflammation, acid reflux, diarrhea, and constipation. Any way you look at it, health suffers unless the body is in balance between acidic foods and base foods.

Without a balanced approach to eating training, recovery, and overall health suffer due to an acidic environment. Basically, you should be eating a handful of veggies while you're gnawing away at your next sirloin.

Four Tips to Balance Your Diet

- (1) Have two handfuls (about two cups) of veggies with each meat-based meal. Eat one before diving into your protein source to jump-start the digestive process.

- (2) Incorporate fermented foods like raw sauerkraut to improve digestion. Not only is it great on Brats (I'm from Wisconsin, dontcha know), raw sauerkraut and other fermented foods are rich in digestive enzymes and bacteria to aid in digestion.

- (3) Kudos on the Scrawny to Brawny program for this one. Blending spinach into protein shakes is an easy way to balance acids and bases in your diet. From here on out, blend spinach into your shakes. Trust me, you won't even taste it.

- (4) Take a greens supplement like ONNIT Superfood. Not only can these replace a multivitamin, but they'll also improve your digestion, immune function, and counteract a high protein diet. Plus, most of us struggle to get our veggies. Pick up ONNIT Superfood and have it you're your creatine first thing in the morning.

Bottom line: You can't train an unhealthy body. Health comes first. You won't ever build lean muscle and improve performance until you're healthy.

5) Don't Fear Fat

If you haven't caught onto the theme yet, calories are the supreme ruler for your hardgainer nutrition. Without enough calories your muscle building workouts are all for naught. One of the easiest ways to increase your calorie intake is to increase your intake of higher fat foods because fat contains 9 calories per gram of fat.

Avoid fat phobia. Instead, increase your intake of fatty foods like grass-fed meats, raw nuts, and cooking with virgin unrefined coconut oil or extra virgin olive oil. All have been shown to increase anabolic hormone levels like testosterone to support healthy energy, libido, and

muscle building.

For example:

- Using 2 tbsp. of olive oil to prepare your meals twice a day can “sneak in” over 60 g of fat and 540 calories into your diet.
- Eating three handfuls (1/4 cup each) of mixed nuts per day adds up to an extra 500+ calories, depending on the size of your hands.
- Eating four whole eggs for breakfast instead of three egg whites and one whole egg adds an extra 18g of fat and 162 calories.

Bottom Line: Fatty foods are the most calorically dense and will drastically bump in calories for building muscle. Furthermore, fats in your diet will support anabolic hormone levels, libido, and energy for better workouts, more muscle, and 2000% more awesome manliness.

6) Hyper Hydrate

The percentage of water in humans varies from 40% to 60%, depending on age and gender. A 160lb dude will have 80+ pounds of water. Needless to say, proper hydration is key for tons of bodily functions. Water:

- Acts as a solvent to dissolve chemicals
- Transports nutrients to and from cells
- Helps waste management

- Plays a role in the synthesis of proteins, glycogen, and other molecules
- Acts as a catalyst for metabolic reactions in the body
- Lubricates joints and tissues
- Helps regulate temperature

Your demands for water obviously increase with hard training. The enhanced metabolic rate of muscle contraction requires a larger delivery of nutrients and oxygen, along with faster waste and heat removal from the body.]

Even the most experienced athletes struggle with water intake. This is despite the fact that a 1-2 % reduction in bodyweight from water loss leads to drops in performance through muscle cramping, decreased endurance, loss of motor skill, and a loss of muscular strength.

Bottom Line: As much as 60% of your body and 75% of your muscle tissue is water. If you're dehydrated you're not performing up to your maximum potential and limiting growth. After training, muscle repair requires fluid for nutrient absorption to maximize recovery. Get dat water bruh.

All the information in the world is great, but it takes a thorough plan to implement change.

For the first two weeks, add a super shake after every workout and for breakfast on every off day. Next, start tracking your calories for the following two weeks.

At the one month, you'll be consuming an extra 500 calories/day in shakes. Bonus: a huge bump in awareness of what's going into your body. This is a huge bump in 15,000 total calories, or an extra 7.5 days worth of food to help you build muscle. Above all...

Commit and Persevere

Ending your hard gainer hardships isn't about the perfect plan. Rather, it's about consistent behaviors that results in long-term change.

Are you a scrawny dude who sticks to a routine and diet for three days and then flips out when you lose a vein and then switches to a fat loss diet? If so, it's time to change.

The road is tough. But you must stay the course and persevere through the tough times.

Muscle growth and getting jacked only take place in the presence of excess calories and amino acids for muscle fiber repair. If you're gaining too much bodyfat, look back at your food log and clean things up.

Shake Up Your Muscle Building Diet

Building muscle is brutally tough work. Some dudes might even say it's impossible.

You probably want a strong, high-performance body that's ripped, muscular, and capable of handling anything the world throws at you. You already train smart. You are dedicated to high-performance training. And you eat a decent diet.

But you are still are not getting jacked.

The key to success? Define your goals, quantitatively and qualitatively.

Quantitative: I want to build ten pounds of muscle and weight 170 lbs

Qualitative: I want to build confidence to ask Jessica Alba on a date. Good luck by the way.

Define what success really means to you. Take specific actions on a consistent basis. You'll build new habits and new behaviors.

The way out of hardgainer hell begins with adding one Super Shake to your diet each day.

Here are my top-four favorite Super shakes to help you pack on the pounds.

HIGH PROTEIN PIÑA COLADA:

This is an awesome post-workout shake, especially when the weather gets warm. This shake is packed with protein and high-performance superfoods like coconut, green tea, and pineapple. I've found it's best to play around with fluid amounts until you determine how thick n chunky you like your shakes.

Ingredients

- 1 frozen banana
- 1/2 cup frozen pineapple

- 1/2 cup coconut milk
- 1 cups ice
- 50 grams protein (1-2 scoop vanilla protein powder)
- 2 tablespoons of shredded, unsweetened coconut (texture and flavor overload added flavor)
- 1 cup green tea Or 1 cup water (pick one, one)

MIXED BERRY BLAST:

The Berry Blast is my go-to when I'm in a rush with 5 a.m. clients. I'll whip up a batch and fill up two shakers. Generally, I'll down one as I wake up and throw the other back post-workout. To maximize post workout efficiency and restoration of glycogen stores drop out the Virgin Unrefined coconut oil to minimize fat intake.

Ingredients

- 1 cup frozen mixed berries
- 2 scoops vanilla protein
- 2 tablespoons milled flax
- 1 cup spinach
- 1 tablespoon raw, unrefined coconut oil

- 1 cup green tea or water (pick one)

NUTTY BUDDY:

This a high calorie shake with a decent amount of fat. I use this a lower-carb snack option and it's best used sparingly. That said, you might roll over and pass out with a smile on your face after downing this nutty beast.

Ingredients

- 2 scoops protein (I prefer vanilla, but chocolate works here too)
- 1 cup spinach
- 2 tablespoons milled flax
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- ¼ cup pecans (cashews also work)
- 1 cup water or Green tea (pick one)

DIRECTIONS: (YES, THESE ARE ALL THE SAME.)

- Place all ingredients into the blender in this order. Seriously, this order works best:
- Ice first
- Frozen fruit over fresh

- Throw in veggies- spinach or Onnit powdered greens won't even be tasted but provide a huge influx of awesome phytonutrients for those lacking in the Veggie department.
- **Protein powder—gainz bro.**
- **Nuts, Seeds, and Toppers—** I add nuts and seeds to most shakes for flavor, high quality nutrients, and fiber. Nut butters work well, although the name still disturbs me. Nut. Butters. Weird.
- Liquid: prefer water or green tea between ½-1 cup. This is highly variable as more liquid means a thinner shake. Play around with your preference.
- Blend for 30 seconds or until desired consistency.
- Drink and enjoy, a finish with push-ups to increase anabolism and muscle gains by 500% bro. I'm kidding. Seriously. But really, do the push-ups anyways.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT:

Building muscle isn't impossible You need a clear picture of where you're going and what success looks like. After that, it's all about making small changes that have a long lasting impact.

Start by drinking one shake everyday and watch the your shirt sleeves stretch and your our strength to skyrocket. Yes, building muscle is really that simple.

Bulkin' on A Budget

It's not just broke college kids who need to eat healthy on a budget. We could all stand to save some cash.

Consider this recent message from one of my online clients.

"Hey Eric, I've been hitting my protein goals, but I can't get over how expensive it is to hit my macros. I feel like I'm going to go broke eating this much protein."

I sat back in my chair and clasped my hands behind my head. I exhaled and thought, "this is a serious problem."

It's not just college kids that struggle with eating healthy on a budget, it's everyone.

Bachelor's, guys between jobs, and even success people struggle to prepare healthy, protein rich foods on a budget.

I've been there too.

It's no lie that personal training can be a grind with low-pay and long hours. That's exactly where I found myself after four years of being a broke college kid.

After counting the dwindling dollars in my bank account, *I knew I had to practice what I preached*, especially if I expected my clients to kick ass in the gym and kitchen.

So that's what I did.

And today, I'm going to share the habits I found to eat healthy even when I'm short on cash. It's time to eat high quality food and look better naked no matter your budget.

Buy Cheaper Cuts of Meat

Forget about eating grass-fed, free range, and wild-caught protein. Pick them up when they're on sale or buy in bulk. Bottom round is your friend. Ribeye? Not so much.

Animals hold toxins in fat. In the case of grain-fed animals, it's best to cut your exposure to whatever hormones get pumped into your steak. The leaner the cut, the more pure the protein source. In other words, you'll get more grams protein for your buck.

Here are some basic guidelines to reducing the cost of protein.

Whey Protein

Whey is a good option. Most proteins offer about 30g/protein for \$1.25-\$1.50, which is a good deal compared to a lot of store bought meat. Try my proteins, but whey is always a staple.

Eggs

Whole eggs are great and egg white beaters are an underrated source of pure protein. Beaters run cheaper than most meats in cost per gram of protein, so feel free to load up on eggs to meet (HAHA) your goals.

Beef

If money is tight, opt for fattier cuts of ground beef. To reduce fat intake on the fat, cook your meat then throw it in a strainer to rinse the fat off. Then season it and you'll have a leaner

ground beef. Other cheaper options include brisket, skirt steak, flank steak, chuck and chuck roast.

Chicken and Poultry

To save on chicken, buy the whole damn bird or get bone-in variations. They'll carry a more fat, but also more flavor. Trim away unnecessary fat and go to town. Also, grab an extra turkey around Thanksgiving; you won't find a better deal. Ground turkey and chicken are also cheap.

Fish

Look for canned tuna and salmon. Wild-caught is ideal, but more expensive. Look for sales.

And in all cases, ground meat and the ole' manager's' special at the end of the meat aisle are cheaper. This meat has to get sold in the next day or so or it exceeds its best-by date, so it's 25% off more more. Unless you want to battle E-Coli from your toilet seat, cook the meat by the date listed or freeze it.

Learn to Cook

Stop making excuses. Cooking takes time.

It looks complicated.

But those are weak, bullshit excuses and you know it.

Knowing how to cook is an essential tool to being human. Plus, if you're able to cook you'll impress anyone you bring over with that jacked new body of yours ;).

Think about it this way:

Historically, if you didn't know how to find, kill, prepare, and cook your food you'd be dead.

Today all you have to do is pick up a cookbook, run to the grocery store, and get to work. Cooking at home is also exponentially cheaper and healthier than takeout food, “grab and go” prepared meals from supermarkets, or restaurants.

For the price of a very modest restaurant meal for one (let's say \$12-15) you can buy 2 pounds of chicken, two pounds of potatoes and lbs of a few bags of frozen veggies. That's three or four meals for the price of a single restaurant meal.

You'll also avoid the hidden sugars, oils, and fats restaurants use to make their food so damn tasty.

Remember: restaurants are after you money. Your waistline and budget is not their concern.

Cook in Bulk

Maximize your “cooking productivity” by doubling what you cook for each meal. This way you'll have grub for an extra day or two.

Besides that, ditch the Netflix bender and start the what my friends at Precision Nutrition call “The Sunday Ritual”. Throw on some jams, grab a beer, and get to work.

Some examples:

Cook 2-3 pounds of ground beef: Cook on the stove-top until browned. For extra flavor on the cheap, , add a packet of taco seasoning. Voila!

Cook 2-3 pounds of chicken. Season chicken overnight with salt, pepper, paprika, garlic powder, and optionally chili powder. Cook in the oven at 375 degrees for 40 minutes.

Grab a ton of fresh veggies. Clean, chop, and store ahead of time. In a pinch, grab a few bags of frozen veggies and cook as needed.

Baked Potatoes (regular or sweet). Cook in microwave for 8 minutes (poke them so they don't explode.) Or halve them and cover in salt, pepper, and a little olive oil before throwing them in the oven with your chicken.

This is enough for 4-5 days for most dudes and has high-quality protein, vegetables, and carbs.

Ditch Organic

Blasphemy, right? I promise, you won't wake up with an extra nipple and immediately get cancer.

Now, I'm not diving into the whole organic vs. non-organic debate. It's almost like discussion politics or religion. The chance of getting people to alter their opinion is slim.

But I will say this:

Organic and grass-fed/wild-caught foods are *probably* better for you. But according to *Consumer Reports*, they're also 47% more expensive (on average) than non-organic food.

My best advice:

(1) Avoid the dirty dozen veggies. These are the most pesticide-ridden foods of all. Included are apples, sweet bell peppers, celery, nectarines, strawberries, cherries, pears,

grapes, spinach, lettuce, and potatoes. In these cases, consider buying organic versions. Stop worrying about everything else.

(2) Buy meat free of hormones and antibiotics. Buy grass-fed (and, ideally grass-finished) meat if you can afford it. The treatment of animals is better for grass-fed and free-range products. That's important to me, so I'll pay extra because it's the humane thing to do.

The benefits to human health of organic eat and produce are less clear. Don't attach too much importance to foods called "organic." Definitions vary, prices are high and ripoffs abound.

(3) If you do buy grain-fed meat, go with the leanest cuts you can afford.

(4) Wash produce to eliminate chemicals. Here's how:

Mix 2 cups of cold tap water, 1/4 cup of white vinegar, and 2 tablespoons lemon juice. mix these ingredients well together and pour into a spray bottle. Squirt your produce 2-3 times, let it rest for a few minutes, and then rinse before munching'.

The big takeaway If cash is tight, don't sweat buying organic. There are many ways to improve your health. Sleep more. Drink less alcohol. Eat more food at home than at restaurants

Re-Evaluate Your Budget

I was talking to a two guys at my pool last week and training came up. One guy talked about how expensive it is to eat healthy.

Five minutes after the conversation ended I heard him say he'd just bought an ounce of weed. (Keep in mind the ganja is legal in Colorado). I'm not an expert on weed prices, but a quick google search gave me an average of \$228.

If you can spend \$228 on getting high, you can buy quality food.

Now, weed might not be your thing. But we all spend cash on stuff we don't need at the expense of more essential stuff. ers.

Think about how much cash you spend on the latest and greatest smart phone, cool shoes, partying, restaurants, cable and auto-renewal subscriptions. ,Now ask yourself: how many of these do you need how they fit your long-term goals?

Like a lot of young guys I used to operate without a budget and spend cash whenever the impulse struck.

Huge mistake.

Most of us spend tons of money on things that provide immediate gratification but don't align with our goals. Then we wonder where our cash went when the times comes to buy something more valuable.

Do yourself a favor. Track track where all your money goes for a month with an app like "Mint."

Then, ask yourself: "Where can I cut back so I can buy better food?"

Unfortunately, most educational systems do a terrible job at addressing personal finance. Once we hit our 20's we start making money, but have little idea how it disappears so quickly..

Start tracking your expenses and pick up *I Will Teach you to be Rich* by Ramit Sethi. This book changed my life and view of finance and yes, groceries.

Go Higher Carb

When building muscle, boosting carbs is one of the best ways to immediately add size. It helps maintain a better mood and sex drive improves training quality, and keeps muscles looking full and pumped, Plus, carbohydrates are the most readily available fuel source for high-performance training and building muscle.

You don't want your muscles to wither away before a summer cut, right?

Everyone is unique. But as long as calories fit your goals, you're going to be okay eating a slightly higher carb diet. Focus on quality sources like fruit, potatoes, rice, and steel cut oats.

it's cheaper to get calories from potatoes and rice than grass-fed steak and free range chicken. Bump carbs to 50% of your macros on a bulk and 30-40% on a fat loss diet. As long as your calories are correct, you'll make excellent progress.

Buy in Bulk and Shop on Wednesdays

Wednesdays are the most popular day for sales in the grocery store. This lets you pick-up food about to hit the "best by" date that you can crush tonight or freeze for later.

But an even better strategy is to buy in bulk. Pick up a membership at superstores like Costco or Sam's Club. There's a cost up-front, but you save on buying in quantity. At worst, find a loyalty card at your local grocery store. These all save big bucks.

Contact a butcher and buy in bulk. I recommend doing this with a friend who has a chest freezer. Yes, you can buy a whole bison or cow and have it diced up into steaks and ground

meat to your liking. One purchase is enough to feed you for a year. If that's not an option, look to buy in bulk at [US Wellness Meats](#).

Pick up hunting and fishing as a pastime.

Growing up in Wisconsin, hunting and fishing were huge. If you're down for spending time in nature and humanely hunting aligns with your belief system, then decompress, get in touch with your wild side, and kill your own food.

Join a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) group. You'll save money, save the environment on transportation costs, and help support local farmers. Most foods are organic and much cheaper than the grocery store. For more info, check out CSA's [here](#).

Eating Healthy on a Budget Comes Down to Choices

Regardless of your finances, there are tweaks you can make to your shopping and how you're spending cash to open up more money for quality food.

It comes down to being financially responsible and sticking to your goals.

And remember, information is only as good as the action you take on it. What action will you take to eat healthier on a budget?

Muscle Building Meal Plans

You don't have to follow this plan perfectly. Think of it as an outline of how to eat the number of calories you'll be needing for muscle growth.

Remember: if you're eating a lot and the scale still isn't budging, you'll need to eat about 150 calories more per day and re-evaluate.

To build lean muscle you'll take your bodyweight in pounds multiplied by 18, find the nearest meal plan to your calories.

Example:

A 160 lb. person = it's $160 \times 18 = 2,880$ calories per day.

If your weight isn't trending in the right direction, bump up to the next highest meal plan.

Sample 1,600 Calorie Meal Plan #1

Breakfast:

Two hard-boiled eggs

[1 Scoop Athletic Greens](#)

Lunch:

Chicken breast (4 oz)

Broccoli (1 cup)

Pre-workout:

1 orange

Post-workout:

[2 Scoops Onnit Hemp Protein](#), this is a vegetarian protein option

One banana

Dinner:

4 6 oz. Ground beef 24 small red potatoes

One cup spinach

2 tbsp. olive oil/vinegar dressing

Sample 1,600 Calorie Meal Plan #2

Breakfast:

Four eggs any style
 1 cup steamed broccoli
[1 scoop Onnit Greens](#)

Afternoon snack:

One orange
 Chocolate protein shake,
 such as [IsoPure](#)

Dinner:

8 oz fish or 96% lean
 ground beef
 8 oz sweet potato or 1.5
 cups rice

Lunch:

Pre-Packaged salmon or 4
 oz. chicken breast
 1 cup steamed veggies

Post-workout:

Protein shake

Steamed veggies or salad
 with olive oil/balsamic
 dressing

Sample 1,600 Calorie Meal Plan #3

Breakfast:

1 scoop whey protein
 1 tbsp. coconut oil

Snack:

2 hard-boiled eggs
 1 orange
 -

Lunch:

4 oz. chicken breast
 1-cup sautéed spinach
 -

Post-workout:

One scoop whey protein,
 such as [IsoPure](#)
 Banana or 2 cups of
 raspberries

Dinner:

8 oz lean ground beef or
 bison
 One large 6-8 oz. baked
 potato with 1 tbsp. butter
 1 cup mixed veggies

Sample 2,000 Calorie Meal Plan #1

Breakfast:

Three eggs

One tbsp. butter

½ cup berries

½ cup steel cut oatmeal

Lunch:8 oz. chicken or fish 2
small potatoesBroccoli or cauliflower ½
cup

12 tbsp. coconut oil

Post-workout:

1 scoop protein

1 banana

Dinner:

1-cup rice

6 oz. sirloin steak

1 cup steamed veggies
with 1 tbsp. butter***Sample 2,000 Calorie Meal Plan #2*****Breakfast:**

Blueberries ½ cup

1 cup Oikos zero Greek
yogurt**Lunch:**4-8 oz. Tuna or packaged
salmon

Spinach salad 1-2 cups

¼ cup raw nuts

Snack:

1 scoop whey protein

1 orange

Dinner:

Ground beef 10 oz.

Rice 1 cup
Steamed
veggies 1 cup***Sample 2,000 Calorie Meal Plan #3***

Breakfast:

4 eggs

Coconut oil ½ tbsp.

Bell peppers ½ cup

Lunch:

6 oz. salmon, fish, or chicken breast

One orange

¼ cup pecans

Snack:

1 scoop chocolate protein

½ cup oatmeal

Dinner:

8 oz. Sweet potatoes

8 oz. chicken thighs or sirloin steak

½ tbsp. butter

1 cup steamed veggies

Sample 2,500 Calories Meal Plan #1**Breakfast:**

One scoop protein powder

One apple

Snack:

3 Hard-boiled eggs

1 oz. Swiss cheese

1-cup carrots

-

Lunch:

Chicken breast 10 oz.

Olive oil 1 tbsp.

1 tomato, 1 cup spinach sauté

Dinner:

1 cup steamed veggies

3 red potatoes

12 oz. steak or 12 oz. lean ground beef

Sample 2,500 Calorie Meal Plan #2

Breakfast

Eggs (any style)

2 oz. ham or turkey

½ cup steamed veggies

-

Snack:

Whey protein

1-2 pieces of fruit

Lunch:

4-6 oz. chicken or fish

1-cup veggies

1 tbsp. butter

Dinner:

12-16 oz. salmon or lean ground beef

1.5 cups rice

2 cups veggies

High Carb Day for 2,500 Calorie Diet**Breakfast:**

3 eggs

1 cup steamed veggies

Snack:

1 scoop whey protein

1-2 pieces of fruit

Lunch:

8 oz. fish or lean chicken

1-2 cups steamed veggies

8 oz. potato (2 medium)

Dinner:8 oz. lean ground beef,
London broil1-cup spinach with 1 tbsp.
olive oil

½ cup rice

1-cup strawberries

Sample 2,750 Calorie Meal Plan**Breakfast:**

Three Eggs any style

1 cup steamed broccoli

1 piece of fruit (berries are best)

[1 scoop Onnit Greens](#)

Lunch:

2x Pre-Packaged salmon or 8 oz. chicken breast

1 cup steamed veggies

1 oz cheese

Afternoon snack:

Two Oranges or two apples

Two scoop Chocolate protein shake, I prefer [IsoPure](#)

Post-workout:

Protein shake (check out recipes in the nutrition module)

Dinner:

12 Oz fish or 96% lean ground beef

10 oz. sweet potato or 2 cups rice

Steamed veggies or salad with olive oil/balsamic dressing

Sample 3,000 Calories Meal Plan #1

Breakfast:

Three egg scramble with tomatoes, bell peppers, 1 tbsp butter

One apple

One [Scoop Athletic Greens](#)

Lunch:

Chicken breast (6oz)

6 oz potatoes

Broccoli (1 cup)

Pre-workout:

One orange, ½ scoop protein powder

Post-workout:

[2 Scoops Onnit Hemp Protein](#), this is a vegetarian protein option

Two bananas

Dinner:

12 oz. Ground beef (92% or leaner)

2 large sweet potatoes

One-cup spinach

2 tbsp. olive oil/ vinegar dressing

Sample 3,000 Calorie Meal Plan #2

Breakfast:

Four Eggs any style

1 cup steamed broccoli

[1 scoop Onnit Greens](#)

Lunch:

2x Pre-Packaged salmon
or 8 oz. chicken breast

1 cup steamed veggies

Afternoon snack:

Two Oranges

Two scoop Chocolate
protein shake, I prefer
[IsoPure](#)

Post-workout:

Protein shake

Dinner:

16 Oz fish or 96% lean
ground beef

12 oz. sweet potato or 1.5
cups rice

Steamed veggies or salad
with olive oil/balsamic
dressing

Sample 3,200 Calorie Meal Plan

Breakfast:

5 Eggs any style

1 tbsp. Coconut oil

1 cup steamed broccoli

[1 scoop Onnit Greens](#)

Lunch:

Pre-Packaged salmon or 8
oz. chicken breast

1 cup steamed veggies

Afternoon snack:

One orange

Chocolate protein shake(2
scoops), I prefer [IsoPure](#)

Post-workout:

Protein shake

Dinner:

16 Oz fish or 96% lean
ground beef

16 oz. sweet potato or 2.5
cups rice

Steamed veggies or salad
with olive oil/balsamic
dressing

Sample 3,250 Calorie Meal Plan #1

Breakfast:

Three hard-boiled eggs

[1 Scoop Athletic Greens](#)

Lunch:

Chicken breast (8 oz)

1 cup of rice

Broccoli (1 cup)

Pre-workout:

2 oranges

1 scoop protein

Post-workout:[2 Scoops Onnit Hemp](#)[Protein, this is a vegetarian protein option](#)

Two bananas

Dinner:

12-16 oz. Ground beef (92%)

4 small red potatoes

One-cup spinach

2 tbsp. olive oil/vinegar dressing

Sample 3,250 Calorie Meal Plan #2**Breakfast**

2 scoops whey protein

1 tbsp. coconut oil

Snack:

3 hard-boiled eggs

1 Orange

Lunch:

8oz. chicken breast

2-cups sautéed spinach

Post-workout:

Two scoops whey protein

Banana or 2 cups raspberries

Dinner:

16 Oz lean ground beef or bison

One large 10-12 oz. baked potato with 1 tbsp. butter

1 cup mixed veggies

Sample 4,000 Calorie Meal Plan #1**Breakfast:**

Six eggs

One tbsp. butter

1 cup berries

1 cup steel cut oatmeal

Lunch:

Chicken or fish 16 oz.

3 potatoes

Broccoli or cauliflower 1
cup

1 tbsp. coconut oil

Post-workout:

2 scoops protein

2 bananas

Dinner:

2-cup rice

12 oz. sirloin steak

2 cup steamed veggies
with 1 tbsp. butter***Sample 4,000 Calorie Meal Plan #2*****Breakfast:**

Blueberries 1 cup

1 cup Oikos zero Greek
yogurt

1 cup oatmeal

Lunch:8-10 oz. Tuna or packaged
salmon

Spinach salad 1-2 cups

½ cup raw nuts

Snack:

2 scoops whey protein

2 oranges

Dinner:

Ground beef (16 oz).

Rice (2 cups)

Steamed veggies (2 cups)

Sample 4,000 Calorie Meal Plan #3**Breakfast:**

6 eggs

2 oz lean turkey sausage

Coconut oil 1 tbsp.

Bell peppers 1 cup

12 oz. salmon, fish, or
chicken breast

Two Oranges

1/2 cup pecans

Snack:

3 scoop chocolate protein

1 cup oatmeal

Dinner:

16 oz. Sweet potatoes

16 oz. chicken thighs or
sirloin steak

1 tbsp. butter

1 cup steamed veggies

Lunch:

Easy Weekly Shopping Guide

Use this as a shopping list in a pinch. With these foods, you'll have all the tools for healthy meals.

1. The best meat and fish you can afford. Hormone-free and antibiotic-free is important. For meat: lean cuts are better than fatty cuts. Grass fed is better than grain-fed from an ethical point of view; health benefits are less clear. For fish, wild-caught is generally better than farmed.
2. Eggs (omega 3 cage free) or free-range chicken
3. Plain Greek yogurt, cottage cheese
4. Protein Powder
5. Spinach
6. Tomatoes
7. Cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, brussel sprouts)
8. Mixed berries
9. Citrus fruits such as lemons and oranges

10. Mixed beans
11. Quinoa
12. Steel cut oats
13. Raw, unsalted mixed nuts
14. Avocados
15. Extra virgin olive oil
16. High Quality Fish Oil
17. Ground flax seeds
18. Tea (green or black preferred)
19. Exercise Recovery drink (carb/protein blend for sports performance and muscle gain, Branch Chain amino acids for fat loss)
20. Greens Supplements

Your Takeaway Checklist

First, congratulations!

You've made it this far. Others haven't.

And I realize I've thrown a lot of information at you

So let's simplify.

You need to do these six key things:

1. Calculate your macros so you're getting enough calories to support lean muscle growth.

2. Check your macros to make sure you're getting a balanced intake of carbs, fats, and protein. There are no bad macros. A balanced diet is best.

3. Take care of your micros: Vitamins, minerals, and water are essential to building muscle and optimizing your health.

4. Adjust as needed. These numbers are NOT set in stone. If you're gaining too much fat, dial-back your calories by 150 per day. Not gaining any size? Increase your calories through carbs first, adding an extra 150 calories to your day. Test this for a week and re-evaluate.

5. Food quality is important. Eat a plethora of fruits, vegetables, lean protein, fish, and starches to support your health and muscle building. Junk food? It's okay in small doses when building muscle, just save it for special occasions.

6. Track your macros. Yes, it's a pain at first, but it will become second nature. Remember, if it was easy to be an athletic, muscular badass then everyone would do it.

You've got this. Own it! You'll be richly rewarded.

Final Words and Tough Love

Eating to build muscle isn't complicated.

You need high quality food and sufficient calories to trigger muscle growth.

Now, it's up to you.

Take action.

Stay consistent.

If building a great body were easy, everyone would do it

But you're different. Unlike others, you're ready to take your body to the next level. How do you do it?

- Meal by meal
- Day by day
- Week by week

**Take control.
And change your life, once and for all.**