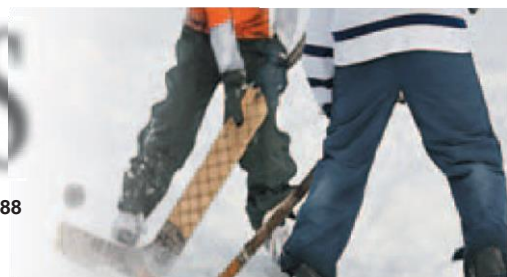


SPORTS

Sean Rooney, editor

403.528.5688

sports@medicinehatnews.com



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Tips for athletes to increase weight gain



**Kimberlee
Brooks**
Training Matters



Kimberlee Brooks, RD,
**MSc, is a sport
dietitian**
**with the Alberta Sport
Development Centre**
and can be reached at
asdc@mhc.ab.ca

A goal many young athletes have is to increase muscle mass and gain weight. I had a young male baseball athlete come to me saying he wanted him to gain 20 pounds in the off-season. He was working with a strength coach and had a good progressive strength training program. But his goal for the amount of weight he wanted to gain was unrealistic for him.

Muscle gain is gradual and it is rare for an adult athlete to gain more than 10 lbs of muscle mass per year. There are four factors that affect weight gain; Genetics, weight training, a high energy intake and rest and recovery. Athletes cannot change their genetic make-up and their genetics will influence the effect of the other three factors.

It is important to discuss realistic weight gain goals for each athlete.

A general food intake approach is to start with increasing your energy intake by 500 calories a day above daily needs. This includes increasing carbohydrates, protein and fat in your diet. It is important to distribute the extra calories throughout the day to provide energy for training and muscle building. For many people this may sound easy, but for some athletes consuming enough food and calories to support their training and weight gain can be a challenge. Lack of time, lack of variety or access to foods, fatigue and lack of appetite are some of the barriers that athletes struggle with.

I suggest athletes approach a high energy diet the same way they approach training. They need to plan, be organized and dedicate time to ensure that their meals and snacks are available when they need them throughout the day. Here are some tips to start.

Spread food throughout the day by having six to eight meals rather than just three. When you increase calories in your diet you also increase the quantity of food. Eating smaller meals will help athletes eat more without feeling discomfort from being too full.

Pack food to take with you. Keep snacks in your gym bag, vehicle or locker so that you have access to food whenever you need. Great portable snacks include trail mix with dried fruit, nuts, and cereal, granola bar with nuts and a bottle of juice, and tuna salad with crackers. Other higher calorie snack ideas include a piece of fruit with Greek yogurt, a peanut butter and banana sandwich, and cheese with whole grain crackers.

Choose high energy cereal in the morning such as muesli, granola or raisin bran. Cook oatmeal with milk instead of water to boost calories. Add a couple tablespoons of skim milk powder or peanut butter to hot cereal to increase the protein.

Choose high energy drinks such as milk and juice at meals and sports drinks during training. Make smoothies with two percent milk, Greek yogurt, fruit and juice. Change it up by adding a scoop of ice cream or frozen yogurt occasionally.

Add healthy fats to your diet by adding avocado to sandwiches, oil based salad dressing to your salads, spreading peanut butter or other nut butters on toast, bagels or crackers and snacking on peanuts, nuts and seeds.

Choose larger portions of healthy foods at meals. Try an additional half a sandwich with lean meat at lunch. Have an extra scoop of pasta, rice or potatoes at supper.

Include high quality protein at each meal such as lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, soy and milk products. You can also boost protein with beans. Add black beans to salads, pinto and kidney beans to chili and tomato sauce and use chickpeas for a hummus bean dip with pita bread.

Gaining weight takes time so don't be discouraged. Plan ahead to make time for training, eating well and getting enough rest and recovery. Be sure to consult a certified strength and conditioning specialist for a training program to support increasing muscle mass. Talk to a registered dietitian to set goals to support your training with a well-balanced high energy diet.