

Starting Strength

Maybe You Should GAIN Weight

by

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Not everybody that goes to the gym wants to lose weight.

This may come as a complete surprise to some of you who either need to lose a few pounds yourselves or think that everyone wants to be skinny. Many underweight men would *love* to be bigger, stronger, and more physically imposing, and gaining muscular bodyweight is a simple process.

Popular culture is currently at war with the notion that a man should be big and strong, because popular culture is at war with the idea of independence and self-sufficiency, and a big strong man *literally* embodies the concept. We are under a daily inundation by the media – in print and video advertising, as well as in pretty much every non-action/adventure film – by images of men who weigh about 150 pounds at 5’9” (that’s 10 stone 10 for the Brits, and about 68 kg at 175 cm for the rest of Europe). The image of Obama’s Pajama Boy is burned indelibly into the national conscience, and it made a very small blister.

Many of us believe that a grown man weighs 200 pounds. He *just does*. Bigger and stronger is better than being underweight – for your health, your athletic performance in the vast majority of sports, and your longevity, as well as your appearance. I know that many of you will regard this perception as petty and superficial. You will say that intellectual pursuits are the true crowning glory of humanity, and that brutish size and strength belongs in the past, with animal skins, stone tools, and sloping foreheads.

If you say this, we will beat the hell out of you.

But more realistically, the typical human reaction to a well-behaved larger man is positive and respectful. More importantly, anyone who has gone through the process of gaining muscular bodyweight will attest to the benefits of having done so, completely aside from the difference in the way he is perceived by others.

Anyway, this piece is for those of you for whom this makes sense. You know who you are, and since this might be the first time you’ve seen such a thing written down, listen up.

The process is simple. This doesn’t mean that it’s easy; it’s just not very complicated. First, you have to give your body a reason to be bigger. This means doing things that require a larger body – gradually increasing the loads it is forced to move. Then, you give it the things it needs to recover from the work, and it will grow. Never fails, works every time.

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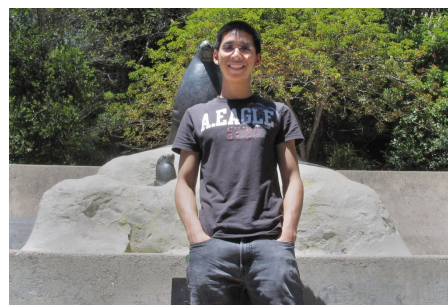
The reason to be bigger is the physical training you make yourself do. There are guys who have taken very hard physical jobs, and their increase in workload and appetite made them get bigger. But the more reliable, controllable, time-tested method is to start lifting weights. Using the major barbell exercises, you start with a weight you can handle and then go up a little every time you train.

The details are simple as well. You go to the gym three days per week, and you do a basic workout that consists of squats, overhead presses, bench presses, deadlifts, and power cleans. You squat every workout, alternate the two press variations, and deadlift or power clean every workout. The lifts are easy to learn, and barbells are commonly available in gyms all over the world. Sets of five reps have proven to work best for our purposes. Assistance work is kept to a bare minimum because it's not necessary for this short-term project; chin-ups are the only other thing you need to do. Likewise, conditioning work is not necessary during this period – in fact, it will slow down your progress. We'll condition later, right now we worry about getting big and strong.

This simple program results in rapidly increasing strength and bigger muscles. Muscles get stronger by growing bigger. Essentially, bigger muscles are a side-effect of getting stronger, and since we know how to get stronger, we just train for strength, we eat and rest enough, and growth happens accidentally.

If you eat and rest enough. Remember: You don't get big from lifting weights – you get big by *recovering* from lifting weights. The things your body needs to recover from the work are food and rest, lots of both. This is really the hard part – most people find it easier to train heavy than to eat enough to both recover from the training and to build the new tissue that adaptation to the work requires. If you want to do a program like this for muscular weight gain, you have to eat more than you want to, more than you're accustomed to eating, perhaps as much as 6000 calories per day for the few months the program will take. After all, what you're eating now hasn't been enough to make you bigger, or you would not be underweight. If you want to be a bigger guy, you have to eat like a bigger guy.

The dietary requirements for gaining weight are the most controversial aspect of the process, because they are almost universally misunderstood. If done correctly, the process of going from 150 to 205 pounds takes less than a year, and this short period of caloric excess is not enough time to kill you. And remember – you are training, *hard*. Training



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gets you in shape, and *being in shape makes you healthier* (this is difficult to write, as it seems so painfully obvious, but I predict there will be confusion).

It is normal for this kind of weight gain to include some bodyfat increase at the same time. But a skinny guy with “razor abs” wearing a shirt is merely a skinny guy. Unless you plan on being mostly naked most of the time, the fact that your abs smooth out a little while your shoulders, chest, legs, and hips get bigger will only be a cause for concern *to you*. Because you’re going to look better to everybody else when you’re bigger. I promise.

Rest is also very important. You grow when you’re asleep, so every hour you’re not asleep is an hour you’re not getting bigger. Sleep is perhaps the single most anabolic agent in the whole medicine cabinet, much more powerful than steroids, and for most of us it requires no medicine at all – just the time, a dark, quiet room, and a decent mattress. Sleep *must* be planned and provided for if the program is going to work, and 6 hours won’t be enough, sorry. A minimum of 8 will be necessary if your training is hard enough to make you grow.

This program is most efficiently followed by underweight men younger than 35. But older men and women of all ages who want to gain weight can benefit from some version of this basic program.

The bottom line is this: Bigger and more muscular looks better than smaller and less muscular. More muscular is also healthier, stronger, and more useful than less muscular. The process is not that complicated, and done correctly it doesn’t even take that long. If you’ve been thinking about what you can do to gain some weight, stop thinking and start doing.

A version of this article appeared in PJ Media 3/6/2014.

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