

MUSCLE GAIN 10 POINT CHECKLIST

Trying to put on some muscle mass/ train harder & not making any progress? Take an honest & open look at your meal plan by using the following checklist to see just how well your meal plan is matched to your goals.

Checklist Questions...		YES	NO
1.	I increase the amount of food I consume on heavier training days. For example, I will always take pre- & post-training snacks, whether or not it's a fitness or weights session. If I have a big day tomorrow, I'll allocate more of my plate real estate to carb rich foods, ensuring the petrol is 'in the tank'.	☐	☐
2.	I aim to eat at least 5 times a day, including 3 main meals (breaky, lunch, dinner) & 2 or more snacks each day.	☐	☐
3.	I include a snack within 30 min of finishing training that includes foods rich in both carbohydrate & protein e.g. 1-2 tubs yoghurt & fruit, a sandwich with ham, cheese & salad, low fat flavoured milk or powdered carb-protein shake on water.	☐	☐
4.	I include a small serve of protein rich food at each meal & snack. For example... - Low fat milk on cereal + tub of yoghurt or 2-3 eggs at breakfast - Low fat yoghurt, milk based shake or tuna/ cheese on crackers at mid meal snacks - Lean cold meats (e.g. ham, pastrami, corned beef, tinned fish, skinless chicken) on sandwiches at lunch &/or low fat cheese - Palm (minus fingers & thumb) of fat trimmed meat, skinless poultry or seafood with dinner	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
5.	If my appetite backs off after a tough training session I'll make use of energy rich drinks (e.g. smoothies, milk shakes) or other nutritious energy rich foods (e.g. dried fruit & nut mix) until my appetite returns.	☐	☐
6.	I always take a pre-training hit of carbs. I know that carbs are the main fuel burnt during training & taking a pre-training hit can increase the total amount of work I do in the gym. More work... greater drive for me to get bigger & stronger.	☐	☐
7.	I recognise that building quality muscle &/or dropping fat takes time. As such, I don't expect to gain any more than 1-2 kg throughout the challenge	☐	☐
8.	I choose not to drink or moderate my alcohol intake when I'm training hard as I know that drinking on the weekend can play havoc with my eating routine. A big weekend can destroy ALL the hard work I've done during the week with my diet & training	☐	☐
9.	I don't get caught up in the mystique of supplements promising to make me better. I recognise that comes from eating smart & training hard.	☐	☐
10.	I'll plan my intake of food throughout the day, ensuring I have access to suitable choices throughout the day, including pre & post training snacks.	☐	☐

Over the next week, focus your energies on changing your meal plan around, turning any 'NO' responses into a 'YES'. Want more information? Read the tips below to help you better understand why the above points are key to successfully improving your fitness & muscle mass.

1. Adjust your energy intake to reflect training loads (energy expenditure)

Left to their own devices, most active individuals eat the same day to day & thus their energy intake also remains the same. This is despite energy expenditure varying significantly. Think about the days you have structured PT sessions or group classes compared with a lazy day at home. Unfortunately for many people, their appetite isn't a sensitive guide to changes in energy expenditure. This means you can tend to over-eat on low training days but also under-eat on heavy training days, compromising fuelling & recovery while also limiting favourable changes in body composition. Instead, you should allow your energy intake to increase on heavy training days while moderating energy intake on training free days. As carbs are the main fuel used during training, it makes sense that your carb intake should be the adjusted to reflect training loads. Simply changing the ratio of veggies to carbs on your plate can go a long way to achieving this... more carbs & less veg on heavy loading days & less carbs with a bigger veg serve on lighter loading days.

2. Base your meal plan on 3 main meals & at least 2 mid meal snacks

It's often assumed smaller, more frequent meals help keep your metabolism up & thus assist with weight management. Recent research has confirmed this is NOT true but there are several reasons why this style of eating is likely more beneficial for active individuals. Eating more often provides regular energy top ups & prevents you from getting over hungry... a common mistake that leaves you vulnerable to the 'hunger bear' who eats everything in sight, resulting in over eating. Including pre- & post-training snacks gets fuel to the muscles when they need it most, maximising the bang for your buck. For those trying to 'beef up' including more frequent protein hits also keeps muscle building turned on throughout the day.

3. Include pre & post-training snacks

A pre-training snack rich in carbs has repeatedly been shown to increase work capacity during training sessions, especially longer &/or more intense sessions. The specific snack you choose will vary based on your daily energy needs, available resources, taste preferences & location. Convenient choices include sandwiches & rolls, fruit loaf & other flour based snacks, cereal, fruit in all of its forms & dairy snacks.

In recovery after training, your muscles are particularly sensitive to carbs & protein. The carbs help fast track restoration of muscle energy levels so your body is ready to back up for the next session while the protein helps to turn on muscle protein building & repair. You should aim for a carb intake of $\sim 1\text{g/kg}$ body mass within 30 min of finishing training & match this with a protein serve equal to 0.3g/kg body mass i.e. 50-100g carbs & 15-30g protein depending on your size.

Get into the routine of periodically weighing yourself before & after training, especially during the warmer summer months. Any weight loss experienced is a reflection of the mismatch between fluid intake & sweat losses. Whatever you lose during training, aim to ingest 150% of this over the next 2-3 hrs to promote effective rehydration e.g. if you lose 1 kg during training, ingest 1.5L fluid over the next few hrs. Drinking with meals is particularly beneficial, as it takes advantage of the salt naturally found in food to better retain the ingested fluid.

4. Include a small serve of protein rich food with each meal & snack

Protein rich foods tend to make meals & snacks more filling. Given this, it makes good sense to include a small serve of protein rich food at each meal & snack throughout the day. You don't need to follow a high protein diet, merely one that has a better distribution of your protein intake. Most Aussies back end their protein intake; consuming half or more of their daily protein intake at dinner. Instead, keep your serve of protein rich food at dinner to no more than a deck of cards (about 100-120g), add some lean ham & low fat cheese to your sandwich at lunch, 2-3 poached eggs at breaky & include a natural Greek yoghurt as a great mid-meal snack. You will feel fuller for longer & avoid those nasty hunger pangs that can wreak havoc with your meal plan.

These 15-30g (aim for 0.3g/kg body mass i.e. ~20g for a 70kg person) hits of protein at each meal & snack also help maximise muscle building after training e.g. 400g flavoured OR 200g low fat Greek yoghurt, 150g raw (120g cooked) meat/poultry/seafood, 60g low fat cheese, 90g tin tuna, 175g Zeagold egg whites or 3 large eggs. Bigger hits of protein than this don't offer any further benefits; you better off allocating more of your plate real estate to some energy restoring carbs.

5. Make use of energy (& nutrient) rich drinks if your appetite subsides post-training

If you're trying to maximise the satiety of your diet (i.e. how filling it is) it's wise to eat your calories, avoiding drinks that contain empty calories like soft drink, cordial, juice & sports drinks. However, hard training sessions can knock your appetite around, leaving post-training snacks difficult to stomach, despite their importance in kick starting the recovery process. If this happens to you, feel comfortable reaching for a nutritious drink (like a low fat flavoured milk or meal replacement powder) that simultaneously helps meet carb, protein, electrolyte & fluid recovery needs.

6. Orientate more of your daily carbohydrate intake around training

Rather than fear carbs, you should look at carbs as a friend when used strategically as they help you do more in a training session, stimulating better training adaptations. The key is getting their timing right & adjusting how much you have based on your daily energy needs. It makes good sense to orientate more of your daily carb intake around training, including your pre & post training snacks. This gets petrol to the muscles when they need it most while also moderating intake at other times of the day. For longer training session i.e. 60-90 min plus, taking on board additional carbs during the session via a sports drink may offer a further performance boost.

7. Take your time, changing shape is a longer term goal

If you are aiming to change shape by increasing muscle mass &/or decrease body fat, make sure your goals are achievable. Changing shape takes time, especially if your goal is to gain muscle & drop fat at the same time. How quickly you change shape will depend on an array of factors, including your commitment to training & diet, but also other factors like your training history & genetics. A gain of 5-6kg muscle over a year sounds pretty impressive but when you break that down to what you might be able to achieve over the duration of the 12 week challenge, it's a more moderate gain of just 1-2 kg. Alternatively, if you are looking to drop some body fat, aim for no more than ½ a kg a week. Faster rates are likely to be associated with muscle loss &/or impaired training quality. By weighing yourself once a week in combination with your other measures during the challenge we can tweak both training & diet to optimise your results. There's nothing more motivating than success!

8. Be wise with alcohol consumption, if you choose to drink

Regular alcohol consumption can really impair your ability to achieve your challenge results. Alcohol is energy dense, containing almost the same energy/calories as fat, yet doesn't provide any nutrients i.e. empty calories. What's more, alcohol is a direct intestinal tract irritant; that's just one reason why you feel average after overdoing it. Remember, alcohol need not be an automatic inclusion in social engagements. How much do you want this?

9. Don't get caught up with the hype associated with sports supplements

While it's easy to get caught up in the hype associated with the sports supplement industry, the cornerstone of your success throughout the 12 week challenge will come down to your meal plan choices using real foods & how hard you train; there are no magic pills or potions. Focus your energies on adjusting your meal plan to reflect the specific goals you are aiming to achieve over the next 12 weeks. Once you've mastered this, only then should you even consider the use of sports supplements. Two products that might be of value for hard training individuals in the 'Fitter, Faster. Stronger' campaign are whey protein isolate/concentrate (WPI) & creatine monohydrate. A serve of WPI after training can help turn on muscle building & repair in a tasty, easily portable shake. Similarly, creatine has been shown to boost recovery when athletes are undertaking repeat, high intensity efforts, like many of the sessions you do during the challenge. Creatine is best taken as pure creatine monohydrate, with a dose of just 5g a day sufficient to boost performance over a 4 week period. Alternatively, you can load on creatine for 5 days, taking a flat teaspoon with your main meals & a post-training snack. Thereafter, resort back to just a flat teaspoon each day. For more information on sports supplements from an independent group, check out the AIS website.

10. Get organised...eating for fitness & muscle gain demands that you are organised & have ready access to food

Following a meal plan that includes regular meals & snacks demands that you are organised, having access to foods throughout the day in-line with your meal plan. Furthermore, the more meals & snacks that come from home, the more successful you'll likely be. It gives you absolute control over what goes into your mouth. Doing a 'cook up' 1-2 times a week ensures you have access to great quality options every day. It takes virtually the same time to cook up enough for 4 meals as it does just 1 so make the most of the time you invest in the kitchen. If you know what you have to eat tomorrow, why not pack up your meals & snacks for the next day so that all you need do is pack them into a cold pack on the way out the door. This can be especially important for those individuals juggling many commitments, including family, work & training. Aim to do one main shop a week but realise you may need to get to the shops once more to pick up additional fresh produce. And fresh is best....not only for nutritional value but also taste & you have to enjoy what you eat.