

Help to put on weight – by Zoe Connor RD, 2007

For some people eating enough to be a healthy weight and to look healthy is a struggle. For some people they are very active, and don't have big appetites, so are naturally thin. Other people feel they eat a lot, but still get told they look too skinny. If you identify with this, this information is for you. Other people may need to regain weight after they have been ill. However if you are very underweight, or have been losing weight recently for no apparent reason, it is important that you get checked over by your GP or family doctor. The advice here is the standard advice given to those who need to gain weight following illness. It isn't a substitute for individualised medical or dietetic advice.

Are you a healthy weight?

You can check if you are underweight by calculating your BMI (body mass index) by dividing your weight in kilograms by your height in metres and then dividing it by your height in metres again. Eg 8 stone = 50kg, 5 foot 4 = 1.63m → $BMI = 50 / 1.63 / 1.63 = 18.8$

If your measurement is below 18.5, you are clinically underweight. If your measurement is between 18.5 and 20 you are borderline underweight. 20-25 is the theoretical ideal weight for height, with over 25 overweight.

If you have been losing weight for no apparent reason, it is important to tell your family doctor or GP.

I'm underweight - what can I do to gain weight?

To gain weight, you basically need to get more calories from food and drink - by eating more, or by eating foods that have more calories in.

Making sure you are eating 3 meals a day, plus 2 to 3 snacks, is enough for many people to gain weight. Other people may need to change the foods they are eating and add extra fats - all foods contain calories, but fatty foods contain the most, so adding fats to your food helps you to gain weight (in the same way that cutting down on fat helps to lose weight).

Saturated fats - those found in meat, butter, dairy foods, and biscuits can raise blood cholesterol levels. Olive oil, rapeseed oil, and oils found in nuts and seeds are not harmful to cholesterol levels and heart health. For short term weight loss - e.g. if you are recovering from a serious illness, this is not a problem, but for the rest of you, the healthier options are marked with a star*. For good health it is a good idea to keep up other aspects of healthy eating and healthy living - regular physical exercise and eating 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

Tips for eating more to gain weight

- Try to eat often even if you can only manage small amounts
- Try to eat three meals a day, snacks between meals, and puddings twice a day
- Drink at least 6-8 cups of nourishing drinks each day. Take drinks after meals to prevent filling yourself up.

- Eat starchy foods at each meal, e.g. bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, breakfast cereal, cassava, yam, plantain or chappatis.
- Eat meat, chicken, fish, eggs, cheese, yoghurts, nuts, beans or lentils at least twice a day. These are protein-rich foods.
- Try to eat fruit and vegetables daily, or take a multivitamin supplement.
- Avoid Diet, Low-fat or Light products - instead use full fat milk, full fat margarine or butter and full fat yogurt for the extra calories.
- Try our tips for enriching your food so that every bite has lots of calories in it

Ideas to enrich your meals:

- *Soups or stews* - add grated cheese, cream, dried milk powder*, evaporated milk, dumplings, baked beans* or pasta*.
- *Potatoes and vegetables* – add grated cheese, cream, butter or margarine*, salad cream, mayonnaise, milky sauces, fried onions, or fry in oil*
- *Puddings* – add cream, custard, butter or margarine, evaporated or condensed milk, yogurt, syrup, honey, sugar, dried fruit*, creamed coconut, nuts*
- *Bread and sandwiches* – use lots of butter, margarine*, mayonnaise, peanut butter, tahini or other nut butter*, chocolate spread.
- *Meat, fish and pasta dishes* – use creamy sauce or cream or cheese, yoghurt or butter or margarine* or ghee or oil*
- *Soup, stews, curries* – add grated cheese or cream cheese, dried milk powder or enriched milk or evaporated milk, cream or crème fraîche, beans* or lentils* or minced meat or peanuts or flaked fish*, butter, oil*, margarine* or ghee, dumplings
- *Breakfast cereals or porridge* – add enriched or evaporated milk, full fat yoghurt or cream, syrup or honey or sugar, nuts* or dried fruit*
- *Full cream milk* - add dried milk powder* – add 2-4 tablespoons to a pint, and use on cereal, in sauces, in drinks etc. Dried milk powder adds plenty of protein as well as some calories.

If you are watching your cholesterol levels, choose olive oil, rapeseed oil, and vegetable oil spreads, avocado, and nuts and seeds to enrich your foods,

Nourishing drink ideas:

Try to drink nourishing drinks throughout the day instead of your normal drinks. You could make up a flask and keep it beside you to drink all day.

- Use full fat or enriched or evaporated milk to make tea, coffee, Ovaltine, Horlicks, Bournvita or drinking chocolate
- Make a nutritious milkshake with full fat milk, puréed fruit and ice cream
- Mix a creamy yoghurt with enriched milk or try yoghurt blended with fruit juice
- Try freezing milkshakes into ice lollies
- Aim to drink a pint of full fat milk each day
- Whole milk makes a nourishing cold drink – try adding blackcurrant squash or mashed banana or ice cream to make a delicious milk shake

Quick and nourishing snack and light meal ideas

- Sandwiches with cold meat, tinned fish in oil*, egg*, cheese or peanut butter. Spread filling thickly and add mayonnaise or salad cream.
- Toast with pilchards*, baked beans*, melted cheese or egg*, peanut butter, chocolate spread.
- Breakfast cereals with enriched milk and sugar or syrup.
- Puddings e.g. sponge and custard, milky pudding, fresh or tinned fruit in syrup with cream, ice cream or yoghurt.
- Crisps, Bombay mix, nuts* and dried fruit*
- Nourishing drink or soup with added cream.
- Biscuits, cake, muffin or flapjack.
- Toasted crumpet, hot cross bun or scone or bagel with butter and jam or honey.

Some of you may like to count calories to make sure you are eating enough

The following is a list of the calorie content of some foods that you could add in to your diet to put on weight. If your weight is currently stable, consuming an extra 300 to 600 calories a day should help you to gain weight steadily

	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Calories (Kcal)</u>
Honey	1 heaped tsp	50
Jam	1 heaped tsp	50
Sugar	1 heaped tsp	25
Chocolate nut spread	average spread 20g	110

Butter or *margarine	1 portion, wrapped	75
Peanut butter	25g	150
Single cream	1 tbsp	40
Double cream	1 tbsp	135
Custard (full cream milk)	average 150g portion	175
Evaporated Milk	quarter pint	150
Condensed Milk	quarter pint	333
Full cream milk	quarter pint	95
Dried milk powder	1 tbsp	75
Cheese (cheddar)	matchbox size	125
Processed cheese	1 slice	65
Cheese sauce	medium portion 60g	120
White sauce	portion 90ml	90
Mayonnaise	1 tbsp	230
Salad Cream	average 30g	100
Fried Onions	57g	95
*Raisins	1 tbsp	90
*Dry Roasted Peanuts	Small bag – 25g	150
Chocolate digestive	x 2	85
Milk Chocolate	50g bar	275
Shortbread	50g	270
Packet crisps	1 packet 35g	190
Chocolate covered biscuit	1	150
*Fruit cake	slice 70g	250
Mars bar	regular 70g	300
*Fruit scone	one 50g	150
Mince pie	one 60g	240

*Cereal with whole milk	bowl	250
Cheese on toast	one slice	250
Creamy soup	bowl	150
Milk puddings	one portion 200g	200
Trifle	one portion 125g	300
Fruit Pie	one portion 120g	310
Sponge Pudding	one portion 110g	375
*Fruit yogurt (whole milk)	125g pot	130
Ice Cream	1 scoop	120
Chocolate mousse	average 120g portion	165
Horlicks (not low fat)	1 mug with full cream milk	200
Ovaltine	1 mug with full cream milk	200
Drinking chocolate	1 mug with full cream milk	180
Bournvita	1 mug with full cream milk	150
Cocoa	1 mug with full cream milk	150

tsp= teaspoon, tbsp= tablespoon, * healthier option