

Keeping Weight On

How thin is too thin?

As you know, the Body Mass Index, or BMI, compares your weight to your height. An "underweight" BMI is less than **18.5**. Here are some examples of people who would be considered underweight:

- Someone who is 5'9" and weighs 125 lbs.
- Someone who is 6'2" feet tall and weighs 143 lbs.
- A 9-year-old boy who is 3¾ feet tall and weighs 40 lbs.
- A 19-year-old woman who is 5'3" and weighs 100 lbs.

(Until age 20, "normal" BMIs are calculated differently, depending on whether your body is male or female.)

Why might you be underweight?

❶ The usual reason is under-nutrition, due to not getting enough food*, or due to an eating disorder in which you avoid eating food. Babies who have "failure to thrive," and other folks with under-nutrition, can *lose* the ability to feel hunger, which makes the problem worse.

❷ Another reason can be malnutrition, in which you eat food but you're not getting proper nutrients. You might have trouble *absorbing* nutrients (as in Crohn's disease or diabetes), or your food might not have the nutrients you need (as when people use artificial milk for babies that is incomplete). Malnutrition can lead to under-nutrition, as the person becomes weaker.

❸ If you can't keep weight on despite eating a normal diet, this is called "*cachexia*" ("ka-KECK-see-ya") and you are "*cachectic*" ("ka-KECK-tic"). This means something is taking away your calories before your body gets them. Possible causes include:

- chronic infection (like tuberculosis or HIV),
- lung or heart disease (like COPD or CHF, where you are working too hard to breathe),
- and cancer (because a tumor is using up the calories).

An overactive thyroid gland can also make you burn up too many calories.

Another cause of cachexia is *addictive drug use* - especially using stimulants like meth or cocaine.

**In 2008, 14.6% of American households could not afford to buy enough food. That's about 1 in every 7 households. People's incomes have gotten worse since then, which means more people are hungry - especially children, disabled and sick people, and older people. See www.worldhunger.org for more info.*

What's wrong with being underweight?

- Being underweight thins the bones, leading to osteoporosis and life-threatening hip and spine fractures.
- Being underweight causes premature births and sick mothers.
- Being underweight makes it harder to think, learn, work or play - at any age.
- People who are underweight get more infections, and have a harder time recovering.
- If a person becomes too weak to feed themselves properly, they can get sicker and sicker until they die. *This can happen at any age.*

How to fix it:

1. See a doctor who can help you figure out what is causing this problem, and how to fix it.
2. Ask the doctor to help you figure out how much weight you need to put on, and how much protein and calories you'll need to get to a normal weight.
3. Take vitamins with minerals along with your new diet. They don't have to be fancy or expensive, and they don't have to be large in size - bigger is not better!

If you have an eating disorder:

Thoughts about food are dominating your life, in a way that other people don't experience. Usual methods of improving nutrition and gaining weight won't be very helpful. You will need an individualized plan to get better. Please visit www.something-fishy.org to find out more.

If you are using meth or cocaine:

Thoughts about drugs are dominating your life, in a way that other people don't experience. Usual methods of improving nutrition and gaining weight won't be very helpful. You will need an individualized plan to get better. Please visit www.addictionrecoveryguide.org or www.na.org for more info.

While you are working on solving the problem that made you underweight,

you should start to add extra protein and calories to your daily food.

*If you add an extra 40 grams of protein **and** an extra 600 calories to your diet every day, you are adding a total of 760 calories (5300+ calories per week).*

*This could help you gain a **pound or two per week**, in muscle, water weight, and fat stores.*

For most people, this is a realistic and healthy place to start.

Here's how:

Step one: Start by adding a nutritional supplement:

- ♥ Slim-Fast (or generic equivalent: approx. 10 grams of protein + 200 calories in each can),
- ♥ or Carnation Instant Breakfast (or generic equivalent), powder packet mixed with 1 cup milk (approx. 15 grams of protein + 220 calories),
- ♥ or one cup of milk with 2 tablespoons of powdered milk added to it (approx. 15 grams of protein + 150 calories).

Average, approx. 13 grams of protein + 190 calories.

Step two: Then add one extra "regular" food to your diet every day:

- ♥ One egg: (approx. 6 grams of protein + 65 calories),
- ♥ or One cup of milk: (approx. 8 grams of protein + 90 calories),

Average, approx. 7 grams of protein + 78 calories.

Step three: Now eat an extra portion of **each** of these every day:

- ✂ Meat or cheese (approx. 15 grams of protein and 100-200 calories per serving),
- ✂ and Starch (approx. 8 grams of protein and 80 calories per serving),
- ✂ and Vegetable (non-starchy, approx. 25 calories per serving),
- ✂ and Fruit/ juice (approx. 60 calories per serving),
- ✂ and Fat (butter/ oil/ mayonnaise): (approx. 45 calories per serving).

Results: If you drink **one** nutritional supplement (Step One), and eat **one** extra egg or have one extra cup of milk (Step Two), and eat **one** extra portion of meat or cheese, starch, fruit, veg, and fat (Step Three), you have added approximately 40-45 grams of protein and 630 calories to your usual intake, and can expect to gain a pound or two per week at that rate.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a serving?

In general, **1 serving = 1 piece** (the size of a deck of playing cards) or **1 serving = 1/2 cup** (about as much as would fill one cupped hand).

<p>What is 1 serving vegetables? 1/2 cup sliced or chopped non-starchy vegetable (examples: broccoli, green peas, sliced tomatoes). <u>or</u> 1 cup salad greens. <u>or</u> 1 cup vegetable juice.</p>	<p>What is 1 serving fruit? 1 piece of whole fruit that fits in your hand. <u>or</u> 1 cup cut-up fruit or berries. <u>or</u> 1/2 cup cooked or canned fruit (example, applesauce, crushed pineapple, canned peaches). <u>or</u> 1/2 cup 100% fruit juice (ex: orange juice, apple juice, prune juice - not vitamin water, soda, or gatorade).</p>
<p>What is 1 serving protein? 1 piece of meat/ chicken/ fish/ tofu/ tempeh/ or veggie burger - as big as a deck of cards (2-3 oz). 1/2 cup cooked meat/ chicken/ fish/ tofu/ tempeh (as much as would fill one cupped hand). 1 large egg (lower calorie if you <i>don't</i> use the yolk).</p>	<p>What is 1 serving dairy? 1 cup milk, soymilk, or yogurt. 1/2 cup cottage cheese. 1 thin slice of cheese smaller than your palm. 1 thumb-sized chunk of cheese.</p>
<p>What is 1 serving starch? 1 slice bread, 1 tortilla, 1 rice cake, 1 pita, 4 crackers. 1/2 bagel or 1/2 english muffin. 1/2 cup cooked starch (as much as would fill a cupped hand; examples: macaroni, rice, beans, oatmeal). 1 regular potato or small corn on the cob. 1/2 cup cooked starchy vegetable (ex: potato, corn, sweet potato, squash).</p>	<p>Others: Margarine, butter, or oil: size of a marble (1 tsp). Peanut butter: 1 serving is walnut-sized (2 Tb). Cream cheese, dressing, mayo: size of 1/2 walnut (1 Tb).</p>