The Hardgainer Challenge

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Have you ever had a long period of hardcore training and what seems to be, a lot of eating, only to see your weight decrease by a kilogram?

As crazy as it may seem, this is the reality of many people in the fitness world, who are trying to gain weight.

These individuals are referred to as “hardgainers” and have the tendency to, well, be clearly unable to gain weight, no matter what they do!

But let’s be real, if someone tells you “I really eat a LOT and just can’t gain”, odds are… Something’s off in their math.

In this short guide, we will talk about the reasons why hardgainers exist in the first place, and how you can deal with that, to finally increase your weight and size

Without further ado, let’s get to it!

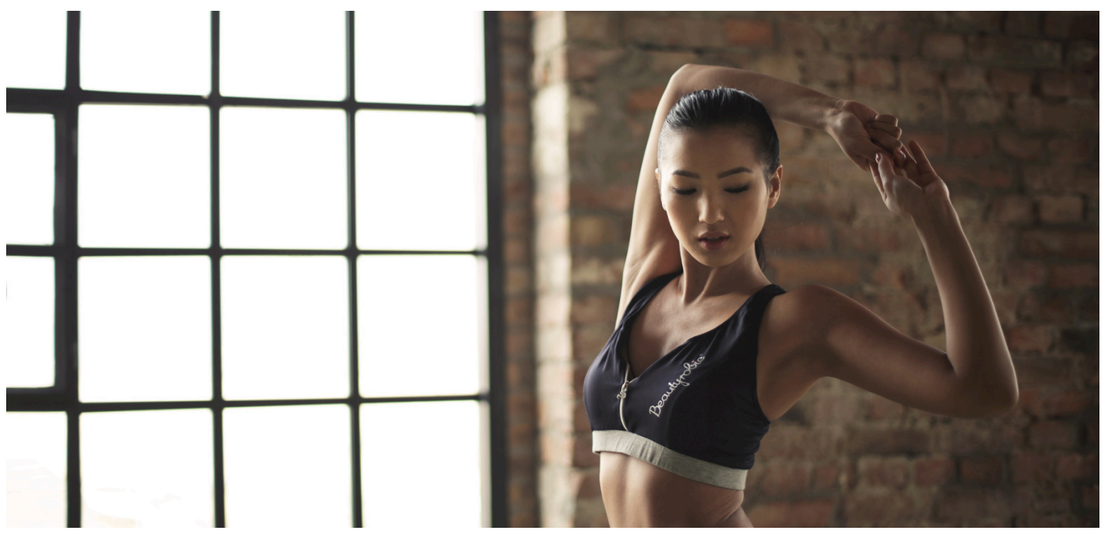
The Reason You Can’t Gain...

Most hardgainers claim that no matter how much they eat, their weight seems to just stay the same or even worse, decrease!

And well, while most hardgainers do tend to consume large portions of food, there are a variety of factors that affect their fullness, satiety and appetite, which ultimately lead to them consuming just the right amount of food to maintain their body weight.

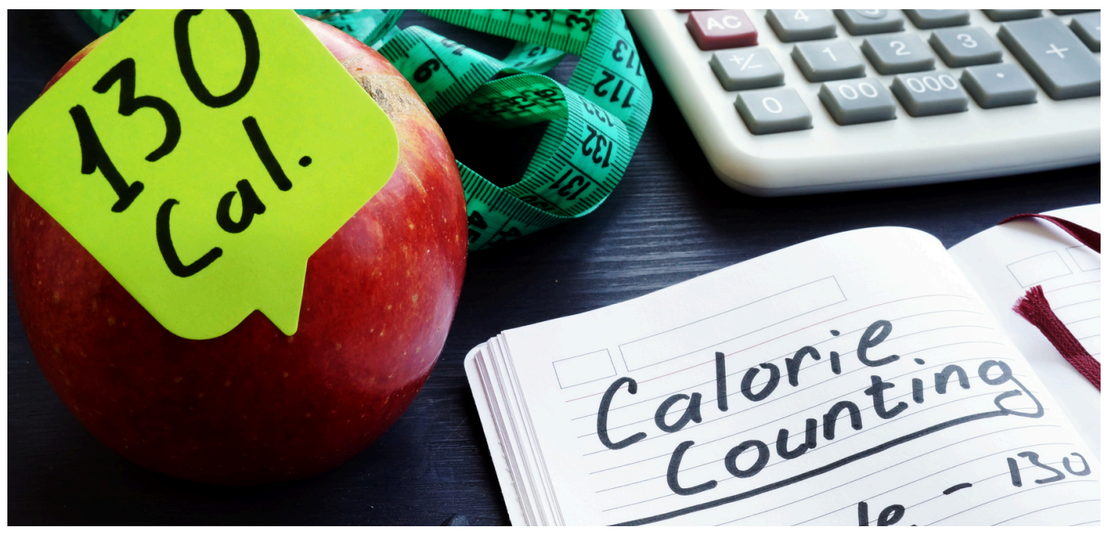
Think of it this way - If you usually eat a lot of food at once, odds are that you will eat LESS during the rest of the day.

There IS a number of calories, at which you will be able to sustainably and gradually increase your weight!





Calories in VS Calories Out



Yes, that is indeed true, my dear hardgainer! The calories in vs calories out rule is valid even for you.

Well, unless you are diagnosed with “hypermetabolism”, where you are able to consume an abnormally large number of calories and still lose weight.

If you are generally healthy however, there is a number of calories at which you will steadily maintain your body weight.

That number is referred to as the “Total daily energy expenditure (TDEE)” and depends on a number of factors:

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Height
4. Weight
5. Non-Exercise Activity
6. Training output
7. Food consumption

Consuming more calories daily than your TDEE will lead to an increase in weight, while consuming less will lead to weight loss.

HOWEVER, ultimately, a healthy body will generally try to naturally just maintain its weight and if you’re not really tracking calories, odds are that your weight won’t change that much.

What this means for you is that you have to find out your TDEE, match it every day and then, add some more food on top of that.

Use this calculator for an accurate TDEE calculation, along with a precise macronutrient calculation for your needs - https://www.traininginthebay.com/macro-calculator/





Eating Consecutively



Now, you may think that calories and macros are the only important thing of your nutrition, but really, there are a variety of other things that may affect the end result.

After all, you have to not just meet your caloric/nutrient needs, but also ensure that you are able to properly digest and absorb them, so that you can get the most accurate satiety signal.

To do so, it is highly recommended that you eat the different products on your plate, consecutively, because different nutrients are digested and absorbed in different parts of your digestive system.

For instance, chemical digestion of carbohydrates happens first in the mouth, and then, in the small intestine.

On the other hand, chemical digestion of protein & fats happens first in the mouth and then in the stomach (which is above the small intestine).

There are a couple of conclusions we can draw from this:

1. Mixed foods (i.e sandwiches) may be suboptimal for nutrient digestion
2. You should consume your carbs and veggies first
3. After that, you top it off with the meat/animal products!

In doing so, you will first consume the foods that are biggest in volume (carbs, veggies) but yet, have low satiety indexes.

This won't instantly lead to you being full and instead, you will have just enough space to top off with your most satiating foods, namely, the meats, eggs, dairy and other animal products.

In doing this, you will get more accurate satiety responses and won't really feel overly full after eating just 80% of your daily maintenance calories.

Thus, adding a bit more food on top won't be a hard task, because, well, you'll want it!



Training & Why It's Important



If you are a hardgainer looking for a solution to their problems, well, it all starts on the plate and goes down to the digestive system!

However, food is just a way for you to give the body nutrients and substances, for it to create new tissue, which you refer to as "gaining weight".

The question now is, what type of weight do you want to gain?

Your best bet will undoubtedly be a combination of active muscle tissue along with some fat.

THIS is how you will not just increase the number on the scale, but also create a more aesthetically pleasing body frame.

After all, eating all that food just to gain fat seems ridiculous, right?

In case you are a hardgainer who also happens to be relatively new to training, here's what you can do to maximize your results and make the best out of the extra food you're eating:

1. Do Challenging Sets

The gym is all fun and games until your low-intensity warm-up is over and it is time to put the actual work in.

After the initial 10-15 minutes of prime time at the start of your workout, start engaging in challenging working sets that take you 1-4 repetitions shy from failure.

As your training experience increases, you can also include sets until full failure to create an even more powerful stimulus.

Generally, as a beginner, you are looking to do ~5 challenging sets per muscle group, per week and that number grows to 15+ as you advance.

2. Rest Enough

Some hardgainers tend to be extremely skinny, which implies that their overall body structure is quite fragile.
For this reason, you do not want to burn your body out in the process of training for weight gain.
Give your body sufficient rest times both between sets and between workouts, to ensure that each tissue recovers enough.

This will massively help you reduce the risk of injury and sustain training performance in time.

Generally, you are looking to rest 2 to 4 minutes between challenging sets and 72-96 hours between each workout for a given muscle group.

Training & Why It's Important



3. Stimulate Differently

The goal of most hardgainers is to get bigger and stronger, meaning that for that goal, different training stimuli should be implemented.

For the most part, weight training is defined by two primary rep ranges:

- The Bodybuilding Rep Range (6-15+ reps)
- The Powerlifting Rep Range (1-5 reps)

The first rep range allows for the more seamless development of bulk muscle growth, which means this should be the primary rep range to engage in as a hardgainer.

Oppositely, the powerlifting rep range allows for the development of maximum strength, as well as explosiveness.

This second rep range should be occasionally included in your training regimen, to stimulate increases in strength, which can then be translated in your bulk-oriented part of training.

To Wrap It Up

In your gaining process, training is the thing that allows for the translation of the extra calories, to active, lean body mass that makes you look bigger, better and stronger!

For this reason, it is important to not just nail your daily calories and macronutrients, but also pay specific attention to resistance training and gradual progressions in it.

In doing both of these things together, you are essentially paving your way to a bigger, stronger, new YOU!

Key Points

The hardgainer syndrome is something common and there are many things people put to blame.

So here are some key points to remember on your hardgainer journey!

1. You are just not eating enough - Find out your TDEE and put in the effort to eat more than that, consistently
2. Eat consecutively - Carbs and veggies first, then protein and fats!
3. Train progressively - Challenging sets that increase in number gradually, with quality rests between sets and workouts
4. Mix training - Combine the bodybuilding and powerlifting approaches for best, diverse results
5. Again, eat, eat, eat...

Now go ahead and jump into your challenge to escape the skinny suit you've been wearing!

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