

A muscular man with short, dark hair is shown in profile, facing left. He is wearing a black tank top and is performing a cable exercise, pulling a rope handle towards his chest. The background is a blurred gym setting with red and black equipment. The text 'HARDGAINER GUIDE' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# HARDGAINER GUIDE

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MAPS FITNESS PRODUCTS





## HOW TO PACK ON MUSCLE IF YOU HAVE BEEN SKINNY YOUR WHOLE LIFE

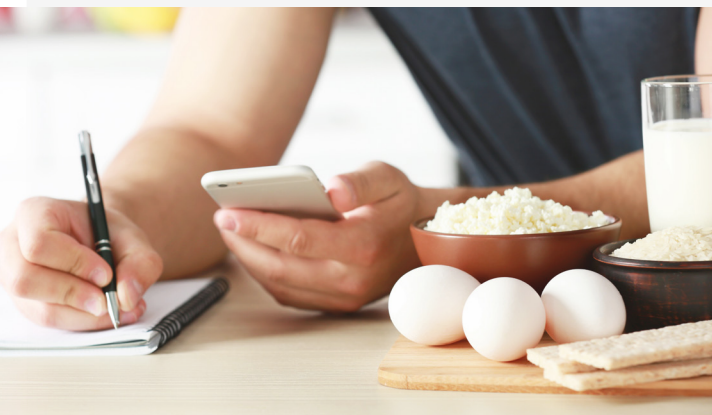
You have been skinny your whole life. You've tried eating tons of calories and protein and you've hammered yourself in the gym yet your body stubbornly **WILL NOT** grow muscle. When you put on a t-shirt you look like a coat hanger. Even skinny jeans feel baggy to you. All you want to do is build some muscle but, frustratingly, **NOTHING** seems to work. You have a **ROARING** metabolism and the standard workouts simply don't seem to work for you **AT ALL**. To make matters worse, when you express how challenging it is for you to gain weight, people snicker and make comments like "I wish I had your problem." In today's age of wide spread obesity, it's hard to get any kind of empathy or even information on how to battle the **OPPOSITE** problem of excessive weight gain.

If you found yourself nodding your head as you read the above paragraph it's because I **UNDERSTAND YOU**. I know what you are going through. I know your frustration. I **AM YOU**. I grew up in a traditional Italian family. We ate and enjoyed food **A LOT**, yet I was so painfully skinny that my aunts and uncles would sit me down and question whether or not I was telling them the truth when I would assure them I was eating enough to feed a horse. I was so insecure about my inability to build muscle or gain weight that the worst thing anyone could ever call me was "skinny."

At the age of 14 I was 6ft tall and under 130lbs!! I wanted to build muscle BADLY. I followed all of the bodybuilding magazine advice and I took every single supplement I could get my hands on to try to change my body. Nothing seemed to work. Luckily, I am very tenacious and I did not give up. I read and studied and tried approach after approach until one day I received some advice that actually worked. I was working out at my local YMCA when I ran into a group of older powerlifters. I was 16 at the time and, although I had been working out for 2 years I had only barely gained (maybe) 5lbs. In between sets I watched these massive men hoist weights that seemed so impossibly heavy that they actually looked fake. After about an hour of watching I mustered up enough courage to ask them for advice. The advice I got from them was some of the best advice I have ever gotten and it resulted in me gaining over 13lbs of muscle OVER A SINGLE SUMMER. Their advice was different from what I had read in the magazines and it WORKED. This sent me on a lifelong journey of questioning what was considered "common knowledge" when it came to building muscle and I became an expert on lean WEIGHT GAIN for "hardgainers."

Through my approach I was able to graduate high school at a lean 180lbs and as I write this today at 40 years old I am 195lbs, lean and have deadlifted 600lbs, benched 350lbs, squatted 440lbs and my arms measure at 17.5 inches cold. Yes, I know those numbers aren't earth shattering, but they aren't bad considering how badly my body seems to WANT to be skinny. I am also 100% natural. I've also been a personal trainer and gym owner for 20 years and I have personally helped hundreds of hardgainers like you gain pounds and pounds of solid muscle. I know what works.

What I am about to share with you is some foolproof wisdom that should work on pretty much ANY hardgainer. Some of it may sound counter to what you have read in the past and some of it may seem basic or obvious. I am going to ask you to trust my advice and give it a shot for at least 90 days. The vast majority of you who follow my advice WILL see some decent muscle and weight gain and will get a better understanding of how to keep gaining muscle for your body. Read this guide, take my advice and be consistent with it and your body WILL respond.



## DIET

Let's start with diet. In order to gain weight, you simply **MUST** eat more calories than you burn. You can't get around this fact and no workout, supplements or even drugs will pack muscle on your body if you aren't eating enough. You are probably thinking "duh, I know this already" to which I reply "you don't know this **ENOUGH**." Most muscle building articles will suggest that you figure out your maintenance caloric requirements (how much food you need to eat to simply stay the same weight) and add 500 calories to it. This is good advice for the average "easy to get fat and gain weight" person, but it won't work for you, the hardgainer.

What is almost **NEVER** communicated to people is how a person's metabolism tends to "speed up" when they eat more food. Its true! When you eat more food, your body burns more calories and the opposite is also true, eat less food and your body burns less calories. This is an adaptive response that our bodies evolved with in order to become more efficient with calories during times of famine and to be less concerned with efficiency when food was plentiful. A hardgainer adapts to higher calories **MUCH MORE** than the average person. In my experience a true hardgainer needs to consume about 1000 more calories than they burn in order to see some weight gain.

In order to apply this advice, you **MUST** learn to track your food so that you know definitively how many calories you need. If you don't do this you are guessing at best. This was actually the first piece of advice those old powerlifters gave me. They told me to eat more. I told them I was eating a ton already. They asked me **HOW MANY CALORIES SPECIFICALLY**, and I realized I had zero idea. Once I started tracking I was able to see that I had grossly over estimated my caloric intake. I thought I was eating more than I was.



Start out by getting yourself a free food tracking app like My Fitness Pal or Fat Secret. Enter in all the food you eat on a daily basis for at least a week. Make sure to do this during a regular week so you can get a real average. Once you have your daily average, add 1000 calories for your new muscle building target.

Now that you have your caloric goal, let's figure out what your macronutrient (or as I refer to them, "macro") targets should be for maximum lean body mass weight gain. Macronutrients are proteins, fats and carbohydrates. The amounts you consume of each will determine whether or not the weight you gain is muscle or fat and they will determine how you FEEL and how you perform in the gym.



# PROTEIN

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Let's start with the macro nutrient that is most directly responsible for muscle gain, protein. BY now you are probably aware that you need to eat a high protein diet for muscle gain. This is true, to an extent. The supplement companies would have you believe that the more protein you consume the better (this way you buy more protein powder). This is FALSE. Eating TOO MUCH protein will hinder your muscle gains by making it VERY difficult to eat enough calories. This is because protein is satiating and isn't very palatable. A plain fat free chicken breast is hard to choke down. Aiming for too much protein usually results in my hardgainer clients simply not eating enough. Eating too much protein will usually mean you aren't eating enough fats and carbs.

**“EATING TOO MUCH PROTEIN WILL  
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ENOUGH CALORIES.”**

Ok, so now that I have made my point, let's talk about the ideal amount of protein. There have been MANY studies on the ideal amount of protein for muscle gain. The number falls

at around 0.8 grams per pound of body weight. I usually round up for hardgainers to 1 gram of protein per pound of bodyweight. In other words, if you weigh 150lbs, you should aim for 150 grams of protein every single day. It's not that eating more protein than 1 gram per pound of bodyweight

is bad for you (although in insane amounts it might be), it's that study after study has shown that there are NO ADDITIONAL benefits from more protein than that. In my experience it's better to eat extra calories in the form of carbohydrates and fats once you hit that 1 gram of protein per pound of body weight goal.



## CARBS

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These days carbohydrates tend to get a bad rap. They have been blamed on everything from obesity to diabetes to even Alzheimer's. Nothing is that black and white when it comes to nutrition. There are many cultures and societies that display amazing health who eat LOTS of carbs. Even though this isn't a wellness guide, I just want to point out that good health is good for muscle building and eating lots of carbs isn't inherently unhealthy.

When it comes to building muscle however, carbs are ALMOST necessary. It's true that for some people under certain circumstances, it may be ideal to try to build muscle on a lower carb type diet. For a short period of my life, I was one of these people. In my late 20's and early 30's I had developed gut health issues and my body simply did not react well to most carbohydrate sources. In that scenario it was obvious that I had to try to build muscle on a diet with lower carbs. To be honest, it worked, but it did not work NEARLY AS GOOD as when I could add carbs into my diet. The most muscle I have ever gained and the fastest muscle I have ever gained has always been on a diet that is relatively high in carbs. This is also true for the vast majority of the hardgainer clients I have worked with.

When consumed, carbs are the preferred source of energy for the body when it comes to athletic endeavors. Studies are pretty clear on this. When compared head to head, a low carb diet usually results in less strength, power and endurance. When it comes to building muscle, you NEED to be able to lift heavy and hard, so make sure to NOT go on a low carb diet.



Once you figure out your total calorie goal, try to get at least 30-40% of your calories from carbs.

**Example:**

For a 160lbs male who is consuming 3000 calories this means roughly 225 to 300 grams of carbs a day. This seems to be the best percentage of carbs I have seen with my clients.

**Good sources of carbs include:**

- White Rice
- Potato
- Quinoa
- Buckwheat
- Fruit
- Corn
- Oatmeal
- Starchy Veggies.





# FATS

Fats are an essential macro nutrient meaning you **MUST** consume a certain amount of fats or you will not be able to thrive and live. Fats are needed for hormone production and for cell integrity. Fats can also contribute to muscle building. The old timer bodybuilders of the 1950's to the 1970's knew this and would routinely consume high amounts of fats, especially animal fats for muscle gain. In fact, saturated fats from well sourced meats seems to have muscle building effects in most people (make sure you are healthy and you have good lipid profile before increasing saturated fat intake).

Dietary cholesterol (a type of fat) has been shown to positively influence strength and muscle growth in some studies. Other studies show that consuming a whole egg with all of its cholesterol is far more effective at producing a muscle building environment than consuming an equal amount of protein without the cholesterol.

In other words, **DON'T BE AFRAID OF FATS**. Eat them up!! My recommendation is to make fat account for about 15-30% of your calories.

## Example:

This means a 160lbs male who is consuming 3000 calories should have about 50 to 100 grams of fat a day.

## Good sources of fat:

- Grass Fed Beef
- Lamb
- Pork
- Chicken
- Full Fat Organic Dairy
- Eggs
- Fatty Fish
- Olive Oil
- Avocado
- Nuts
- Coconut
- Seeds

Try to avoid heavily processed vegetable fats like canola oil or safflower oil and they can promote an unhealthy inflammatory response.



## TRAINING

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Alright, let's get into training. Of all of the things you do to build muscle, training is the most important. I know it sounds a bit controversial since everyone else places the most value on diet, but it's the training that sends the signal to build muscle in the first place. If you don't train or you don't train properly your body will have no reason to build muscle.

When you lift weights with sufficient and appropriate intensity, you are stressing your body. You literally damage your body to a small extent and your body tries to adapt to this stress so that a similar event in the future will not cause any damage. It's an ADAPTATION RESPONSE. Understand this fact and you will view and apply training in much more effective ways.

Since your body has a limited ability to adapt, you will need to send an APPROPRIATE stress signal. Too low of a signal and your body has no reason to adapt. Too high of a signal and you overcome your body's ability to adapt. The more advanced you are the harder and longer workouts tend to need to be and the more deconditioned you are, the easier and shorter workouts need to be. You should also understand the context of your current health and life. Due to your limited ability to adapt to stressors consider the following; if your life is currently VERY stressful or you aren't eating well or sleeping well then you should be VERY careful with how hard and how long you train. Overdoing it will stop muscle growth in its tracks.



For muscle growth it's important that you focus on getting STRONGER. Hardgainers typically respond very well to programs that aim to increase strength rather than those that focus on the pump. Strength based workouts use straight sets with long rest periods in between (1-3 minutes) and lower rep ranges (6-8 reps). If you consistently get stronger and you are eating an adequate amount of calories you WILL build muscle.

Although any kind of resistance will send a muscle building signal, all exercises and methods are NOT equal. Machines and cables have their place but they simply aren't as effective for building MASS like barbells and dumbbells. In fact, when I train hardgainers I almost EXCLUSIVELY use free weights. The best muscle building exercises on earth are free weight based.

Barbell squats, rows, presses and deadlifts pack muscle on almost anyone.

Train your whole body frequently rather than hammering a body part once a week. The hardgainer needs more frequent stimulation than the average lifter, so rather than splitting up the body into body parts. And training one or two of them a day, train the whole body three days a week. This approach is superior for the hardgainer.

As far as sets are concerned, a good rule of thumb is to aim for 9 to 18 TOTAL sets per week per body part. Since you will be working your whole body three times a week divide your total sets per workout. In other words, if your total set goal per week is 9 then do 3 sets per workout per body part. If you are a beginner (less than 6 month experience) aim for the lower range of sets and if you are experienced and healthy (1-2 years of consistent training) aim for the higher range of sets. ALWAYS do the minimal amount your body needs to respond and grow. If you're building muscle and getting stronger at 9 sets per week then stay there! Doing more sets won't result in more gains and, in many cases, might actually be too much and cause a plateau.

Start all workouts with the larger muscle groups first and end with the smaller ones. Here is a good example of how body parts should be trained on a hardgainer full body type workout:

- |              |           |
|--------------|-----------|
| 1. Legs      | 5. Arms   |
| 2. Back      | 6. Calves |
| 3. Chest     | 7. Abs    |
| 4. Shoulders |           |

# SLEEP

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Quality sleep is massively undervalued when it comes to building muscle. This is too bad, because I speculate that a good chunk of people who struggle with building muscle can place the blame squarely on their lack of good quality sleep. Study after study shows that lack of sleep contributes to a hormone profile which makes building muscle all but impossible with growth hormone and testosterone being depressed, and muscle burning stress hormones like cortisol being elevated. If you are training hard you **WILL NEED** 7-9 hours of sleep every single night. This means on the weekends too. In my experience, hardgainers tend to need at least 8 hours of quality sleep for optimal results.

Notice how I keep saying the word “quality” before sleep. This is because just being knocked out isn’t the same as having recuperative and healthy sleep. When it comes to poor sleep quality, one of the biggest culprits is electronic blue light exposure before bed. Some studies show an up to 90% drop in the beneficial

sleep hormone melatonin when subjects were exposed to electronic light right before bed. You want **GOOD** levels of melatonin. Low melatonin means lower growth hormone and higher melatonin means more growth hormone which means a **BETTER** muscle building environment.

Ideally you should turn off all electronics 2 hours before bed, but this is hard to do in modern times. Most of you work or do homework on a computer or even on your phones. It’s not realistic to expect all of you to disconnect 2 hours before bed every night. The good news is that modern technology offers a solution. Blue blocker glasses greatly reduce the amount of electronic blue light that your eyes and brain are exposed to. Although blue blockers aren’t as good as turning everything off, studies show that they can have a pretty dramatic positive effect. My recommendation is to wear blue blockers for at least 2-3 hours before bed to maximize sleep quality.





## SUPPLEMENTS

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Most supplements simply don't do much when it comes to building muscle. If protein intake from food is adequate then taking a protein powder won't help you at all. All of the exotic supplement pills and testosterone boosters are a complete waste of money. In my opinion, you should save your money and spend it on food or a good gym membership or workout program like MAPS instead.

That being said, one supplement alone has been **PROVEN** to build more muscle in most people. Creatine is safe and will give you pretty clear strength gains within the first 2 weeks of taking it. 2-6 grams of pure creatine powder a day works well for most people. Some people may experience gastric upset from creatine however. If this is you then don't take it.

There you go, everything you need to get yourself on the muscle building track. For more detail on exercises and technique make sure to download our free resources here. One final word: **BE CONSISTENT**. Skipping workout days and having poor diet days will kill your muscle building potential faster than anything. Be as consistent as possible for at least 90 days and you can expect to gain a considerable amount of muscle within that time. Good luck!



## SAL DI STEFANO

Sal was 14 years old when he touched his first weight and from that moment he was hooked. Growing up asthmatic, frequently sick and painfully skinny, Sal saw weightlifting as a way to change his body and his self-image. In the beginning, Sal's body responded quickly to his training but then his gains slowed and then stopped altogether. Not one to give up easily, he began reading every muscle building publication he could get his hands on to find ways to bust through his plateau. He read Arnold's Encyclopedia of Bodybuilding, Mentzer's Heavy Duty, Kubrick's Dinosaur Training, and every muscle magazine he could find; Weider's Muscle and Fitness, Flex, Iron Man and even Muscle Media 2000. Each time he read about a new technique or methodology he would test it out in the gym. At age 18 his passion for the art and science of resistance training was so consuming that he decided to make it his profession and become a personal trainer. By 19 he was managing health clubs and by 22 he owned his own gym. After 17 years as a personal trainer he has dedicated himself to bringing science and TRUTH to the fitness industry.