

## Nutrition for Swimming: How to gain weight

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One of the most common questions I get asked by parents is how can they help their swimmer gain weight. Understandably, many become concerned when their child looks underweight compared with their peers or struggles to keep their weight up. This is a very common scenario around puberty when children grow at very different rates and it can be very frustrating for the later developer to watch their peers bulking up while they stay skinny.



Looks aside, increasing muscle mass is an important goal for all swimmers as it confers a performance advantage. But many young swimmers have a hard time putting on weight (and keeping it on). This is partly down to genetics and their stage of development around puberty – hormonal rises accelerate muscle growth - but also due to the fact that some children (and adults) are naturally ‘fast burners’: they burn more calories than other folk. They fidget, they don’t like sitting still, they pace, they hop from foot to foot while standing, they are animated when they talk. Not only are they active with swimming but they are also more active when doing everything else! The technical term for these spontaneous movements is ‘non-exercise activity thermogenesis’, or N.E.A.T.

### ***Tips for boosting calories***

You can’t change their genetics or their tendency to fidget but you can boost your swimmer’s calorie intake. Instead of filling them up with ‘junk’, focus on high calorie nutrient-dense foods (see the box below). Here are 5 tips to help them bulk up healthily

- Make eating and drinking a priority. Aim for 3 meals with 3 or 4 nutritious snacks in between
- Plan ahead. Help them schedule their meals and snacks around their training, education and social commitments so they always have access to suitable foods and drinks.
- Eat consistently. They should never skip meals
- Add high-energy, nutritious foods: cheese, nuts, dried fruit and healthy oils . Scatter grated cheese on vegetables, soups, potatoes, pasta dishes and hotpots. Mix nuts, seeds and dried fruit into breakfast cereals, porridge and yoghurt. Spread bread,

toast or crackers with peanut butter or hummus. Drizzle olive oil, dressing or mayo over veggies and salad.

- Serve bigger portions - particularly of pasta, potatoes, rice, cereals, dairy products and protein-rich foods.
- Think liquid nutrition. Provide nutritious milk-based drinks, e.g. milk, flavoured milk, hot chocolate, milkshakes, yoghurt drinks, and fruit & yoghurt smoothies. Studies show that milk-based drinks increase muscle protein manufacture after exercise.



### ***High calorie nutrient-dense foods for weight gain***

- *Nuts — peanuts, almonds, cashews, brazils, pistachios*
- *Dried fruit — raisins, sultanas, apricots, dates*
- *Wholegrain sandwiches and wraps with cheese, chicken, tuna, peanut butter or egg*
- *Yoghurt, cheese and eggs*
- *Milk, milkshakes and flavoured milk*
- *Porridge; wholegrain cereal with milk (e.g. Oatibix, Weetabix, Shreddies, Oats n More)*
- *Oil and oil-based dressing, e.g. olive oil, rapeseed, mayonnaise*
- *Oat-based cereal bars, granola bars or flapjacks*
- *Bread or toast with peanut butter or cheese*

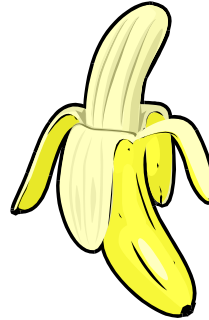
### ***How much protein?***

To put on muscle, they need to consume adequate calories as well as protein. Protein needs of young swimmers are greater than those of their non-athletic peers – around 72 – 84g for a 60kg swimmer. They can get this from a balanced diet.

In fact, the timing of their food intake in relation to training sessions is just as important as the amount. Encourage your swimmer to consume around 10 – 20g protein within 30 minutes of training. This will help repair muscle tissue damaged during training and support the making of new muscle tissue proteins. The meal or snack should contain carbohydrate plus protein.

Good options include:

- 500ml milk or flavoured milk or milkshake
- A 125g pot of yoghurt plus an oat-based bar
- 250ml milk plus a handful (25g) of nuts and a banana
- A slice of toast with peanut butter plus a 125g pot of yoghurt



### ***What about supplements?***

Weight gain and protein supplements claim to increase muscle mass but there is little scientific evidence to support them. These products are expensive and not necessary. There is no guarantee that supplements are drug-free, even when all the ingredients listed are permitted substances. British Swimming advise CAUTION before taking any supplement as its the swimmers is responsibility to ensure they are not taking a banned substance. Refer to [www.informedsport.com](http://www.informedsport.com) for a list of tested sports nutrition products.

Swimmers should be able to meet their increased calorie requirements and nutrients through 'real' food options. You can make your own weight gain drink by blending 300 ml milk with 2 tablespoons milk powder, a 125g pot of yoghurt and a banana.

**For more information and easy healthy recipes: Sports Nutrition for Young Athletes by Anita Bean, available from [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)**

