

Muscle Gain for the Basketball Athlete

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In high school and college gyms across the land there are tens of thousands of basketball athletes on the fringe of taking it to the next level. And while technical skill and basketball IQ certainly come into play, muscle size and strength limitations don't fall far behind on the list of things preventing these guys from reaching their goals.

If many of these athletes made the commitment to train hard and eat big off-court their chances of success would sky-rocket. So, in today's article, we'd like to share with you some strategies for helping basketball athletes eat right for muscle gain.

Calories and Muscle Gain

As we all know, calories are consumed from the foods and beverages we eat and drink. And these calories are used for powering muscle, fueling the brain, and more. Of course, consuming more calories than we need for training and daily activity means storage for later.

Now, protein and carbs can be stored in our muscles. And that's the kind of storage we want when talking about muscle gain for basketball players. But, excessive intake of the wrong stuff (and in the absence of appropriate training) can mean fat storage. That's what we want to avoid, or at least minimize, when bulking up for sport.

So, the keys to building up our muscle protein and carbohydrate stores without building excessive fat stores, are: eating more of the right stuff, eating less on the not-so-good stuff, eating excess calories, and eating right for your body type. The following will help you determine the best way to do just that.

Foods to Eat More Of

The following chart lists 21 foods we think are great for boosting muscle gain. We generally have our athletes post this chart in a visible place. Then, each time they eat one of these foods they place a check mark in the relevant box. Here are the rules:

Men:

If you're looking to increase muscle mass or fuel your high intensity training, shoot for 5+ servings of each food every week. Of course, these won't be your only foods eaten each week. They'll just make up most of your weekly fare.

Women

If you're looking to increase muscle mass or fuel your high intensity training, shoot for 3+ servings of each food every week. Of course, these won't be your only foods eaten each week. They'll just make up most of your weekly fare.

Muscle Building Foods	Category	Servings Per Week				
		1	2	3	4	5
Protein Foods						
Lean Red Meat (93% lean, top round, sirloin)	Protein – Lean Meat					
Salmon	Protein – Fish					
Omega 3 Eggs	Protein – Dairy					
Low-Fat, Plain Yogurt (lactose-free if you can find it)	Protein - Dairy					
Supplemental Protein (milk protein isolates, whey protein isolates, or rice protein isolates)	Protein - Powder					
Carbohydrate Foods						
Spinach	Carb - Vegetable					
Tomatoes	Carb - Vegetable					
Cruciferous Vegetables (Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower)	Carb - Vegetable					
Mixed Berries (strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, etc.)	Carb - Fruit					
Oranges	Carb - Fruit					
Mixed Beans (kidney, navy, white, etc.)	Carb - Legume					
Quinoa	Carb – Grain					
Whole Oats (large flake)	Carb – Cereal					
Fat Foods						
Mixed Nuts (a variety of different types of nuts including pecans, walnuts, cashews, brazil nuts, etc.)	Fat – Seeds and Nuts					
Avocados	Fat - Fruit					
Olive Oil (extra virgin)	Fat – Oils					
Fish Oil (salmon, anchovy, menhaden, krill)	Fat - Oils					
Flax Seeds (ground)	Fat – Seeds and Nuts					
Liquid Drinks						
Green Tea	Teas					
Liquid Exercise Drinks (quickly digested carbohydrate and protein)	Recovery Drinks					

Increasing Calorie Intake

In addition to eating the right foods, it's important to increase calorie intake to the point that energy intake exceeds energy expenditure. This is often easier said than done because most tall, thin athletes tend to have to over-eat to exceed energy demands. In other words, muscle gain for the typical ectomorphic basketball player means eating even when they're not hungry.

A good rule of thumb during periods of muscle gain is to eat 3-4 food meals per day (including lots of the muscle gain foods discussed above) and including another 2-3 "Super Shakes" each day between meals. Here's an example of a delicious and calorie-dense "Super Shake" that could be consumed 2-3 times per day between meals:

- 1 cup unsweetened almond milk
- 2 scoops muscle milk vanilla or other protein supplement
- 1 cup raw spinach
- 2 cups frozen berries

And here's another:

- 1 cup unsweetened almond milk
- 2 scoops muscle milk chocolate or other protein supplement
- 1 frozen banana
- 1 cup raw spinach
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter

When using this strategy, track body weight and composition for the first 2 weeks. If the goal is to gain weight and it's not happening, increase the serving size of each food meal until measurable weight gain is evident. If weight gain is happening, keep up the good work. Keep tracking and adjusting as necessary.

Eating Right For Body Type

Once weight is moving in the right direction, make sure that body composition is too by having your athlete eat right for their body type. Generally, we've found that different body types tend do best with different macronutrient intakes. To help illustrate this, here's a chart:

Body Type	Characteristics	Example/Average Starting % Protein	Example/Average Starting % Carbohydrate	Example/Average Starting % Fat
Ectomorphic -Naturally Thin w/ Skinny Limbs	Thyroid dominant, fast metabolic rate, high sympathetic nervous system activity, higher carbohydrate tolerance.	Approximately 25% protein	Approximately 55% carbohydrate	Approximately 20% fat
Mesomorphic	Testosterone and	Approximately 30%	Approximately	Approximately 30%

- Naturally Muscular & Athletic	growth hormone dominant, moderate carbohydrate tolerance, moderate to high sympathetic nervous system activity.	protein	40% carbohydrate	fat
Endomorphic -Naturally Broad and Thick	Insulin dominant, slow metabolic rate, low sympathetic nervous system activity, low carbohydrate tolerance.	Approximately 35% protein	Approximately 25% carbohydrate	Approximately 40% fat

From this chart, it should be clear that not one diet fits all. Without breaking out the calculator, here are a few easy to remember rules that can help an athlete customize his/her intake.

Protein and Body Type

When it comes to choosing protein intake, many of the general protein recommendations were established to prevent protein deficiency. And this isn't the optimal amount for the person looking to optimize body composition.

To optimize intake, it's best to include a protein dense food at most (if not all) meals during the day. Also, in general, the more endomorphic a person is, the more protein they need.

Carbohydrate and Body Type

Some athletes tolerate carbs better than others. It's important to make adjustments accordingly. In general, the more endomorphic a person is, the fewer carbohydrates they should eat.

Another important consideration is timing. Carbohydrate tolerance is highest in the morning and during/after workouts, most athletes benefit from eating carb dense foods at these times.

Making Better Carb Choices

Processed carb foods negatively alter hormonal profiles and blood fats. So, when eating to gain muscle, it's best to keep carbohydrate choices unprocessed. For most meals, stick to carbs that are close to how they're found in nature: whole oats instead of a granola bar; wild rice instead of white; yams instead of potato chips; berries instead of fruit snacks.

Vegetables, beans, peas, fruits, whole grains, nuts and seeds contain a carbohydrate called fiber. It acts like a janitor in the gut and helps clean things

up. An absolute minimum intake of fiber would be 25 grams per day. Gut motility is imperative to performance.

Fat and Body Type

Fat from food becomes part of cells in the body. By emphasizing “healthy” omega 3 and monounsaturated fats like olives, olive oil, avocado, coconut, nuts, seeds, fish, algae, and fish oil supplements, cellular health and performance will be superior.

Plus, as you see from the chart above, the more endomorphic a person is, the more fat they should eat. So, in essence fat and carbs are inverse. The more fat, the fewer carbs. And vice versa.

Other Considerations

When an athlete is eating for weight gain, it’s important to be aware of a few things beyond calories and nutrients. Here are some daily strategies to consider.

1) Nutrition should be simple.

Assuming the athlete is eating Precision Nutrition style, training at least 5 hours per week, and still isn’t gaining, the reason is simple: for whatever reason, they’re not in a positive energy balance. They must create one by either eating more and/or training less.

2) Make decisions based on progress.

We know this seems intuitive. However, most people drop the ball. Instead of changing a plan haphazardly, it’s important to make regular progress assessments (such as bi-weekly body composition tests) and change nutrition based on the results.

3) Stick to nutrition goals long enough to assess changes.

Many athletes get impatient, hoping to see daily changes in their body. And if these changes aren’t apparent, they bail. The body doesn’t work that way. It takes at least two weeks – sometimes longer – to see a measurable change. And even then, the changes can be small.

4) Have food ready.

Anyone who’s successfully changed their body realizes that knowing what to eat is only part of the battle. The real magic happens when it’s time to eat it. The food must be ready – or it won’t get eaten. Even if an athlete knows everything in the world about nutrition, if they open the fridge on Monday morning and find is a package of Capri-Sun, they’re doomed. Developing basic preparation and storage strategies can ensure long-term success. This means getting rid of the junk food and stocking up with nutritious food, and more importantly, having the nutritious food ready to eat.

5) Eat at regular intervals.

Inconsistent eating is the kiss of death when it comes to gaining muscle. Eating every 2-4 hours throughout the day keeps a steady supply of nutrients in the body.

6) Listen.

Body awareness is critical. If certain foods don't work, nix them. Make sure to look for unique responses to food and plan the menu accordingly.

7) Know muscle.

Muscle is made up of protein, water, phosphates, and minerals. With muscle growth we have changes in mass, density, shape, and function. When someone participates in consistent training and surplus eating, muscles adapt.

8) Control blood glucose.

Stabilizing blood sugar is important as it helps keep appetite in check while better managing mood and energy levels. Workouts aren't very productive if an athlete is cranky and fatigued. Controlling blood sugar is best accomplished by consuming regular feedings of protein, unprocessed carbohydrates and healthy fats.

9) Breakfast.

Skipping breakfast often leads to overeating nutrient poor foods later on. Lots of nutrient poor calories isn't optimal for muscle growth. Also, restricting AM food can cause muscle loss.

10) Workout nutrition.

Intense training breaks down the body. Consuming carbohydrate and protein during and after workouts, in the form of recovery drinks, can promote muscle growth and recovery.

In the end, don't commit to finding the perfect diet. It'll just lead to frustration and procrastination. Instead, take the principles you've learned in this article and apply them broadly. By doing that, muscle gain is just a few meals away.

About The Authors

John Berardi and Ryan Andrews are part of the world-renowned Precision Nutrition team. And their work is responsible for bringing elite-level nutrition advice to both high-level athletes and recreational exercisers around the globe. For more great nutrition from Dr Berardi and Ryan Andrews, visit www.precisionnutrition.com.