

If You FEAR FAT, You'll Never GET JACKED

I have to start this topic with a confession. Contrary to what many of you might believe, I was not born a Hairy Viking Chad capable of deadlifting a small automobile. On the contrary, I was a wholly unathletic child that completely wasted all of my physical potential. I believe I ran a 12+ minute mile as part of the presidential fitness test in middle school, just as a point of reference. Complementing this lack of athleticism was a surplus of fat. Yes I was indeed a fat kid, and the only thing that probably spared me from being a full on morbidly obese kid was the fact that I have been ridiculously tall at all points in my life, which comes with the benefit of needing more energy and having more room to distribute all that fat. Because of this, I had, and to a lesser degree still have, major issues related to feeling fat and worrying about becoming fat. I still hate being shirtless and mostly avoid it as much as possible. I know I am not alone in having these feelings, but as someone that went through largely coming to terms with them I have to tell you that you cannot be afraid of gaining fat if you ever want to become jacked. Being willing to push bulks sometimes is critical, and if you insist on being as lean as possible at all times you will never grow.

I know first hand that this can be very difficult to accept, particularly if your lifting career started off with a goal to lose fat, or if you have been fat for a significant part of your life previously. You do not want to go back to that, you do not want to undo all of that progress and become the person you worked so hard to get rid of. I get it, been there and done that. So while I can tell you that you have to suck it up and gain back some fat sometimes, I know you won't really internalize it, even if you accept it as being true logically. I don't have magic words that will rewrite your worldview, you likely developed this issue over years and that is a lot of momentum that needs to be wound down, then build back up in the opposite direction. So what I want to do is walk you through some of the benefits of committing to a bulk, and why doing so will make it much easier to stay leaner long term on top of getting you way more jacked. I'll also walk you through some things you can do to work on lessening your hang ups with fat gain, all based on my experiences with it over the last decade.

First I want to explain why the perfect 'lean bulk' is basically a fairy tale and why all the content producers promoting the idea that you can totally gain only muscle with no fat in a gaining phase with whatever secrets they are selling are keeping their unfortunate viewers small and weak. While it is true that the actual number of calories needed to add muscle at the rate you are likely to gain it even as a beginner is incredibly tiny, it's just not practical to reliably hit such a tiny surplus and you are never going to see anywhere close to your maximal potential rate of muscle gain doing so. Maintaining a surplus, or a deficit, is a game of averages. Your expenditure is going to be a little different every day, food nutritional data comes with an accepted degree of error and most foods are not wholly homogenous so there is variability between portions.

This isn't generally a problem when you work with a reasonable surplus, as even if you are bit off some days and miss the goal, you are still firmly in a surplus so you will have the needed

nutrition to grow. You do not have this luxury if you are trying to just barely overshoot your expenditure so you can maintain or whatever the midwits are calling it, you're just not going to be in a surplus and as such you will not grow during those periods of below average intake. Beyond that, your body has a surprising large amount of tweaks it can make in order to skew your expenditure in order to try and maintain homeostasis. This is something I would have probably adamantly denied 5ish years ago until first hand experience showed me otherwise. You can maintain activity levels and your total daily expenditure can drop or rise quite a bit in response to a deficit or surplus respectively.

So if you insist on trying to eat only 100 calories over your determined maintenance you are likely going to find that your body will catch up to that pretty quickly. This room for adaptability is not endless so you can push past it pretty easily with larger surpluses, ensuring that you are reliably putting on weight, read: muscle, through your whole gaining phase. Finally I firmly believe that the higher energy environment you provide your body, the more muscle it will pack on. Whether this is because seeing a higher surplus makes the body more willing to invest in highly metabolically active tissues like muscle (yes I know I am improperly anthropomorphizing biological processes here), or just that having more food/energy in you lets you hit your workouts that much harder I do not know. But I have observed time and again that when I really pack the food in I see better growth, even if it is paired with more fat gain.

So bigger bulks mean bigger gains, how does this help you ultimately stay leaner? If your goals are more about being good looking and lean rather than being as big as possible maybe you think you do not need to unlock the highest rate of muscle growth when you are gaining. That would be wrong. If your goal is to get and stay lean you absolutely should bite the bullet and gain that muscle mass as soon as you can. Having more muscle mass is an absolute cheat code to getting and staying lean.

Being larger, and specifically being larger through lean mass, shoots your energy expenditure just from existing through the roof. On top of that, almost all of your activity will expend more energy as well. When you walk you have to move more weight, expending more energy. Your workouts will (hopefully) be with heavier weights, which will again expend more energy. I would never tell a beginner to consider a standard resistance training session as a source of major energy expenditure, but once you add a couple hundred pounds, or more, to every working rep it adds up fast. When I started lifting I was only a little lighter but my bulking calories were around 3-3.5k per day. Now they are over 6k. You know how hard it would be to get super fat while maintaining my exercise at this point? I would have to be drinking melted gallons of ice cream daily. My cutting calories now match my original bulking calories and I cut hard. If this massive increase in energy expenditure was not enticing enough you also get to consider that having muscle means you look much leaner at any given body fat percentage. You can appear equally lean at mid teens when you have a ton of muscle as someone without much at low teens, and mid teens is much easier to maintain long term in terms of lifestyle and quality of life. If your ultimate goal is to be lean all the time, you should invest in some muscle mass with a few solid bulks. Think of it the same way as putting money into a retirement fund, give up a little something now, so you can have a lot more later.

So hopefully your rational side is sold on why you need to commit to your bulks to see good growth and why that growth is a really good thing if you do not like having fat on you, but that doesn't do much for the irrational, emotional side that is calling the shots here. You can't reason your way past deep seated insecurities and hang ups. Like I said earlier, you are going to need to stop the momentum going one way and build it back up in the other direction. The best way to do this, and how I inadvertently did it, is just by repeated exposure to gaining and seeing that it didn't make me a fat ass again and that nothing bad happened when I gained some weight back. In fact good things happened, I got loads bigger and stronger. Start off by just pushing a bulk as far as you can tolerate. Maybe it's not a big surplus, or a long bulk. Maybe you go for what I would consider the bare minimum of 250 calories over maintenance and you err on the side of caution when estimating intake, going a little under that more often than not. Maybe you cut the bulk short because you cannot take seeing yourself get a little less lean or seeing the scale go up a ton. Just do what you can, and then observe the results. Are you suddenly a whale again? No. Has everyone around you started treating you like a fat person again? No. Besides the negative voices in your head, has any real, actual, tangible negative come from your bulking and gaining a little fat back? The answer is going to be no. That is the first step, seeing first hand that your fears and concerns are not based in reality. It will probably not be enough to turn you completely around, but it builds the momentum in a positive direction. At this point you just need to keep repeating the process, pushing a little harder on the bulk each time and reflecting on the results. This might take a long time, but that is fine. You have time, all that really matters is that you are moving forward.

As a bit of a tangent, that I feel it related to this topic, is how this issue with fear of weight gain can lead to issues with your diet and relationship with food. When I first started monitoring my diet I jumped head first into tracking and counting calories. And it absolutely worked, you really can nearly perfectly influence your rate of gain and loss with regular weigh-ins and diligent tracking/adjustment. But I got really wrapped up in it. I think the prevalence of full blown clinically relevant eating disorders among gym goers is exaggerated, but I do think that having an unhealthy relationship with food is very common. I was overly fixated on sticking to diet for years earlier in my lifting career. I would feel significant distress and discomfort when social obligations pushed me off course. I was unable to completely enjoy what should have been fun events due to the stress of not being able to eat 'properly'. And I know that I am not alone in having had that attitude. Don't get me wrong, there were benefits to eating that way, I have a much deeper understanding of what is in all the foods I eat nutritionally speaking, and I significantly overhauled my palette to the point where I enjoy much more nutritionally dense and rich foods. But my over focus on diet did a number on my mental health at a point in my life where things are already hard and hectic. This kind of problem can exist equally in those that are afraid of being too fat and those that are afraid of being skinny again, and the general solution is the same as I described before.

You just need to expose yourself to dietary deviation and see first hand that nothing bad happens. I can tell you right now that unless you are in late stage prep for a bodybuilding show the difference between being ~85% on point with diet and 100% is nearly non existent. Your cuts and bulks will end up the same wherever you fall in that range. If you eat a meal that you

don't track or that isn't on your meal plan a few times a week nothing bad will happen. If you grab a snack when someone leaves stuff on the breakroom table at work nothing bad will happen. Going to a party or home for the holidays and just eating whatever is there isn't going to halt your progress. But your rational side isn't in control here, even if it is willing to take me at face value. The irrational side is, and it needs to have its face shoved into reality many times to stop clinging to its silly notions. So we use the same protocol as before. Force, or rather allow, yourself to take small deviations from your diet plan. Take them as far as you comfortably can, which might not be much, then just observe the outcomes. See that you end up in the same place when you have an extra snack sometimes while cutting. See that your bulk is unaffected when you go out for dinner instead of cooking for yourself. Eventually you will become desensitized to the occasional 'lapse' and you will be much better off for it. Trust me, you likely have plenty of very real reasons to be stressed and things to worry about in life, you do not need to artificially inflate that number by adding "I grabbed half a cookie from the plate at work and now my cut is ruined" to that list.

So there you have it. I think I was much nicer and more forgiving than I normally am on this topic, and maybe that's just because I can personally relate to people with this kind of issue. This is not to say that it's okay to stay perpetually small when you want to be big, or that you can eat recklessly and it doesn't matter if it stops you from reaching your goals. There are plenty of things you can do, or not do, that will have very real consequences for your progress and I do not want anyone to mistake those for the things I talk about here. If you are one of the types of person I am talking about in this topic, I think you will know. You're almost certainly already aware that you are being irrational but are reluctant to acknowledge it or unsure how to go about overcoming it. If you are just someone who is unwilling to put in the work needed to improve and want to delude yourself into thinking that this is a big, strong, experienced internet stranger giving you license to continually self sabotage so you can 'learn to love yourself' I cannot stop you, but please don't. There is plenty of content out there to enable you and I do not want to be mixed up with it.