



The Top 25 Ways to Pack on Serious Mass

My time here at Icon Performance has been one that has been very interesting and exciting. As you probably already know, I work as an exercise physiologist / strength, speed & conditioning coach / sports nutritionist working with a variety of amateur / professional athletes including bodybuilders, powerlifters, Olympic weightlifters, strongmen, arm wrestlers, football, basketball, baseball, wrestlers, mixed martial artists and hockey players among others. I have always had a descent percentage of my nutritional clientele being athletes, but as of late it has really increased. I receive numerous emails regarding proper nutritional planning on a daily basis. One of the most asked questions that I receive is how to gain lean muscle tissue while maintaining their current body fat percentage. Well, you are in luck! I will be discussing with you the top 25 ways to pack on serious mass. For all the lightweight lifters out there looking to go up a class, or you mass monsters looking to put on yet more size, this will definitely get you on your way to some serious mass!

#1

Eat 5-6 Times per Day

What did you just say? Eat 6 times per day? Yes, that's right! Don't think that you are going to gain quality size eating 3 square meals per day. The only type of mass you will put on eating this way will be the fat type, and this is not our objective. There is no way that you can reach your caloric or your macronutrient needs eating 3 meals per day. If by some magical reason you can eat them in 3 meals, than you will be so full and bloated, you won't be able tie up your own shoes let alone pound out some heavy deadlifts. Get rid of the mentality that athletes can optimize their performance on three meals per day, it's scientifically impossible. Eating 5-6 times per day will also keep your blood sugar levels stabilized and your metabolism elevated. Eating several times per day instead of the "Big 3" that most are used to, will provide your body with a constant supply of nutrients that you need to recover from your hard workouts. This will cause you to increase your lean tissue, while reducing your body fat percentage. Our goal here is to put on lean muscle mass, not take our body fat level to new heights.

#2

Drink Water

Water is very important for many reasons. Water is good for you believe it or not. It has many health and performance benefits. It keeps your organs functioning properly, clears toxins, reduces excess sodium from your body, and it hydrates your muscle cells. It even liberates fat stores on your body so they are burned off as an energy source. Dehydration will cause a major decrement in performance. Even a 2% state of dehydration will cause your performance to go out the window. Just because most athletic events aren't out in the heat, it doesn't mean that proper hydration isn't important. Water plays a major role in cell volumization. This is where nutrients are pulled inside of the muscle cell causing a multitude of reactions that leads to muscle growth. Water is very important in many processes including digestion, transportation and the absorption of nutrients. So how much water should you drink on a daily basis? You should drink on average at least 1oz of water per kilogram of bodyweight. This is a figure that can be increased depending on many factors that affect your hydration level. This amount will start as your baseline from which you can build upon. A 220-pound (100kg) athlete would need to drink 100 ounces or slightly over 3 quarts of water per day as his minimum daily water intake. Remember that optimally one should strive for 1 oz per pound of bodyweight per day. But the previous numbers are a good starting point for those who hardly drink any water at all. There are also many benefits to drinking water. They include lowering your chances for high blood pressure and kidney stones. Both of these nice little health problems can really cause havoc on your training. Try banging out some box squats when you're passing kidney stones the size of jawbreakers. It's not going to happen

#3

Sleep

Sleep is not considered a food group so why am I talking about it in my nutritional column you ask? The reason why sleep is going to be discussed here is that it is essential in gaining lean mass. Your body repairs and recovers from your workout ONLY as you sleep. During this time, your muscles grow! Remember this, if you aren't sleeping you aren't growing and getting stronger. Think back to a time when you couldn't get optimal sleep either during university exam time, or another time when sleep was of the essence. Think back how your strength level was, or how you were actually losing size. So how much sleep do you need per day? You should be getting at least 8 full hours of sleep per day. If you can get a 1-2 hour nap per day on top of this it would be even better. Getting proper sleep is a must for muscle growth. Without it, you can kiss gains in strength and size goodbye!

#4

Consume Enough Protein

"I eat enough protein. I probably ate around 50 grams today." Now if this sounds like you, we are in some serious trouble. That is unless you are a 60- pound child whose major energy expenditure for the day is playing with your Tonka Trucks. Ok, down to the serious stuff here. If you don't eat optimal amounts of protein, you will never put on the muscle mass that you so much desire. You are also hindering your strength gains as well. If you are going up a weight class and you aren't eating the proper amount of protein, guess what? You will put on a nice

extra layer of fat around your waist, instead of gaining lean muscle tissue. When trying to put on size, you have to make sure you constantly supply your body with essential amino acids throughout the day. You should consume at least 1 gram of protein per pound of bodyweight per day. I have some of my athletes consume between 1.25-1.5 grams of protein per pound when trying to pack on size. If you just jack up your carbs and fat without supplying your body with the protein that it needs, you will end up looking like “Mr. Marshmallow” instead of a strength athlete. Amino acids are the building blocks that you will need to gain lean muscle tissue and to ensure that going up a weight class will be muscle, not fat. Protein helps in the recovery of your muscles from the intense training you perform as an athlete. As you probably already know, protein is the main nutrient responsible for increasing lean muscle tissue. You can work out all day long but if you don’t eat the right amount of protein for your specific needs and activity expenditure, than you will never reach your peak in strength, that’s guaranteed!

#5

Maximize your Carbohydrate Intake

Carbohydrates... You gotta love them. Yes we all know that they are definitely the tastiest of all the macronutrients, but how do we incorporate them in putting on size. Make sure that when you are trying to gain solid weight, you consume plenty carbs. Now don’t think that there is only one way to do this. I have had great success with my clients using diets that include both carbs and fats on a daily basis, and plans that restrict them for a certain number of days and then are super compensate for a specific number of days. What you need to know is that there is more than one way to get the job done.

Now when trying to put on size with a nutritional plan where carbs are going to be consumed on a daily basis, you should consume 1.5-3 grams of carbs per pound of bodyweight per day. You must be thinking, how can I eat all that? This doesn’t all have to come from food, as there are many good glucose polymer drinks available that can help you fulfill your daily requirements.

One glucose polymer drink can supply 100 grams of carbohydrates in as little as 12-16oz of water. I just made this a lot easier didn’t I? The majority of carbohydrates that you should consume when you are trying to go up a weight class should come from complex carbohydrates. These include oatmeal, whole-wheat pasta, potatoes, yams, brown rice, ancient grains including quinoa, amaranth, millet, and teff. What’s nice about these grains is that they provide variety in your diet and are an excellent source of complex carbohydrates. Let’s not forget your fibrous carbs including your salads and vegetables. These are very important and should be consumed with at least 3 of your daily meals. Fiber is very important in the digestion process and eliminating toxins from the body. If you are not getting adequate amounts of fiber in your nutritional plan, it is now time to increase your daily intake. It’s hard to pack on size if you have a severe case of constipation. You may laugh, but this is one of the first things that happen to someone trying to gain weight. Many individuals increase their caloric and protein intake yet; they forget to do the same with their fiber and water.

#6

Bump up your Fat Intake

Fat is where it’s at, especially if you are a strength / sports athlete. I know you get as sick and tired as I do of all those aerobicizers telling you that you should eat 10 grams of fat per day. Your fat intake is definitely associated with how strong you will be. Now don’t get the wrong idea here. This doesn’t mean put extra Mayo on your tuna sandwich, or a quart of gravy on your

turkey breast. Nor does it mean to put some extra non-dairy creamer in your coffee, or load up on fatty cuts of bacon and sausage. Yes, you want to increase your saturated fat intake slightly when trying to pack on size for your new weight class, but the majority should come from your polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Good fats can / should consist of 30% of your total caloric intake. This is not written in stone, as I have had my clients on programs that were higher and lower than the above. By the way, fat has 9 calories per gram, so this will help you out with your calculations. Good sources of Omega 3, 6 and 9 fats are salmon and other cuts of fatty fish. In the past, athletes and bodybuilders avoided these fatty fish. Now, they realize the benefits of these fish fats and understand how beneficial they are not only for your health, but your performance. You can get some good sources of monounsaturated fats from various nuts and avocados. With this all said and done, you now know that fat is a very important nutrient in your quest for strength and size. Without it optimized in your plan, you are giving your competition more than a “Fat Chance” of beating you on the platform.

#7

Drink Milk

Milk...It does a body good! You should have known this would be on the list. Milk is the drink of all strength champions throughout history. Let's take a look back into the past. Paul Anderson, a man whose strength feats have gone down in history used to drink several gallons of milk per day. I read that he used to drink a gallon of milk just during his workout. If you look at the eating habits of the strongmen and athletes of the past, milk was a major part of their diet. Even the old school bodybuilders used to drink large amounts of milk. It supplies the body with an excellent source of protein. Its main source is casein protein, which is a slower released protein source than whey. It also supplies simple carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals to help round things out. Milk has different caloric rates depending on which type you consume. Athletes should drink 2%, 1% or skim milk, as it will supply you with valuable calories when looking to gain weight. For those athletes that have lactose intolerance issues, Lactaid brand milk is an excellent alternative. The lactose, milk sugar, that is considered a mild food allergen, has been taken out to a great degree for those with lower GI issues. The best way to consume milk is with your protein shake as it can really help with the taste. When trying to pack on mass, milk should definitely be part of your plan! The best time to consume your milk is either first thing in the morning upon waking, immediately after your workout to take advantage of the body's depleted state and right before one goes to bed because of the “timed-release” long chain breakdown of the complex protein molecule.

#8

Increase your Meat Consumption

I knew you would like this one. What true athlete wouldn't? Now again, don't get me wrong here. The point is that you should increase your lean meat consumption during a mass phase. Note I said lean meat consumption. This doesn't include bacon, ham, sausage, deli meats, beef jerky, or pepperoni sticks. I know you wish that is what I would be recommending, but your ever visibly growing waistline and your triglyceride rating wouldn't be thanking me down the road. The types of meat that you should be consuming should include skinless chicken breasts, lean cuts of steak, extra lean ground beef, turkey, veal and lean cuts of pork. When trying to put on size, you should consume lean red meat on a daily basis. At least one meal of the day should consist of red meat and the other meals can be comprised of fish and lean white meats like turkey

and chicken. Make sure that the cuts are lean and you cut off any visible fat. Sorry about that, but if you consume all the fatty meats the only thing that will go up is your cholesterol level, not your performance. Lean cuts of meat should be a staple in all athletes' diets.

Here you have a piece of the how to guide to go up a weight class while making sure that the weight that you put on is lean tissue, not just another roll around your waist. After reading this series, you are realizing that going up a weight class doesn't mean it's time to load up on your favorite junk food to help fill out your new weight limit. To properly gain quality weight you have to make sure that your nutritional plan is on the money, otherwise you can forget about going up a weight class while retaining your current body fat level. Most people think that it is easy to pack on weight and they are right, if putting on fat weight is your goal. The purpose of this series is to make sure that the weight that you do put on is solid muscle, and not just an extra layer of fat around your hips and waist. Putting on quality weight that will lead to a bigger total is our objective. There are many misconceptions on how to properly go up to the next weight class. What we have to remember as athletes is that by going up a class we have to produce a total that is competitive at that new class. What was elite at your old class won't pull you through in the next division up. With this in mind what we must realize here is that we have to put on as much lean muscle tissue as possible while minimizing any fat gain. This can only be done through a well planned out nutritional and supplementation program.

#9

Use a Protein Supplement

In a time when most of us live very busy lives and are constantly are on the go, a protein supplement in the form of a meal replacement or protein shake is essential. If we take a look at one of the rules in part one of this series, it was to eat 5-6 small meals per day. Now, eating 6 solid meals of food per day for most people would be a major problem. One way to make this much simpler is to eat your regular breakfast, lunch and dinner and have a protein shake in between each of those meals. I just made your life a lot easier didn't I? The fact is that we need at least one gram of protein per pound of bodyweight as athletes, especially when we are trying to go up a weight class. Now if you have ever looked at a macronutrient breakdown chart of different foods you will notice that to consume all the protein that you need on a daily basis is almost unrealistic, that is unless you have an appetite like mine. When you look at the protein content of different foods and then you calculate how much you have to eat at your bodyweight, you then ask yourself, "How the heck am I supposed to get in all that protein without feeling like I just inhaled half of the country's livestock?" Having 2-3 protein shakes per day will help you fulfill your protein needs and will make your life in the kitchen a lot easier as well.

#10

Consume Fast and Slow Acting Protein Sources

Like most people, you must be wondering what is a fast or slow acting protein? Fast or slow acting is in regards to the time your body release the amino acids into the bloodstream. Now whey protein is a fast acting protein. It is the fastest to enter your bloodstream and to upload into your muscle cells. The problem with whey is that while it is highly anabolic or growth

producing, it is not very anti- catabolic. A slow acting protein like casein will do a much better job at preventing you from going into a catabolic or muscle wasting state. Supplement companies are constantly bashing each other saying that their protein whether its whey or casein is better than the other. The fact is you have to look beyond all the hype and look at scientific studies. The fact is that you need a combination of both to fully get the job done. Remember the best time to use whey is post workout so that the amino acids get pulled inside the muscle cell the fastest and during the day and night use a combination of slow and fast acting proteins.

#11

Eat By the Clock

When trying to put on size, you just can't eat when you get hungry, otherwise it will take you a lot longer to get up to your next weight class. You have to eat by the clock; otherwise you will not meet your caloric and macronutrient needs by the time the day is over. With this in mind set a schedule that you will follow and have a meal or protein shake every 2.5- 3 hours. Not 4 or 5 hours but every 3! This is very important in your quest for size. This is dictated by the fact that it takes protein approximately three hours to digest. After that window is left open for too long your body will go into a catabolic state and try to burn muscle for a fuel source. This will make sure that you get at least 5 quality meals in per day. I know that this sounds a little compulsive but in no time this will just become part of your lifestyle. This will mean that you will have to have all your food prepared the night before so that you will have it ready when you need it. Don't just think that you will just cook something when the time comes as most likely you will get lazy and you will just skip the meal. Eating every three hours has many benefits. First, it will keep your metabolism elevated. Second it will keep your blood sugar levels stable throughout the day and will prevent you from getting those after lunch energy lows that so many people complain of. Next it will keep you in a positive nitrogen balance and will supply a constant stream of amino acids to your muscles, thereby keeping you in an anabolic state. As you can see eating by the clock is definitely worth it!

#12

Eat Before Going to Bed

Now I knew I would get a lot of cheers for this one, but hold on a second. Just because I said that you should eat before going to bed doesn't mean you have a blank check to go on a nightly binge of nachos and ice cream. Sorry to break your heart but we have to make sure that we have specific nutrients that are going to keep you in an anabolic state throughout the night. It is during sleep that your muscles recover and grow from the tough workouts you perform in the gym. So not only is it important to get proper sleep time, as mentioned in this series, but making sure that your body has the nutrients available to repair and rebuild lean muscle tissue while at rest. Now you must be asking, what should I be eating before going to sleep? First you want to make sure that you supply your body with a high quality protein source. This will keep you from going into a catabolic or muscle wasting state while you are sleeping. It is during your sleep that you go the longest time without food. You don't want to consume just a fast acting protein like whey either.

Like I mentioned in rule # 10 you have to consume a combination of both in your diet. At bed time you want a protein source that is going to stay in the blood stream as long as possible and provide a sustained release of amino acids to your resting muscles. One good example would be cottage cheese with whey protein mixed in. Next you want to make sure that you provide yourself some healthy fats at this time as well. A nice Omega 3-6-9 formula will do the trick and provide a balanced ratio of the different fats. These fats are involved in many processes including reducing inflammation and testosterone production. What a better time to take advantage of this than when you are sleeping. Fat will also slow down the release of amino acids into the bloodstream even further. Eating the right things before going to sleep for the night is essential to putting on muscle and recovering from your workouts.

#13

Take a Multi Vitamin and Mineral Formula

During times of hard strenuous training the body needs optimal amounts of micronutrients. These are your fat and water-soluble vitamins, major minerals, trace minerals and electrolytes. These micronutrients even though small in their dosages are very important for you performance and strength. Taking a multi vitamin and mineral pack is essential in making sure that you don't have any deficiencies in any of the above categories. Optimal intake of vitamins and minerals are essential for life. If a deficiency occurs, the body will not function optimally which can lead to illness and even death in severe cases. Vitamins act as co-enzymes, which perform many roles and functions in our body. They work as catalysts to release energy from the foods that we consume. Minerals play a role in many processes. These include muscular contractions, fluid regulation, energy production, nerve transmission and protein metabolism. Do you remember the last time you cramped up at your competition after you weighed in? That most likely was caused by an electrolyte imbalance due to your method of losing water weight so close to the competition. Not taking a multi vitamin and mineral formula as a strength athlete is like driving a racecar without a seat belt.

#14

Never Skip Meals

What's the big deal about skipping meals? If I didn't mention it then you wouldn't fully understand the consequences of skipping meals. I know, I have heard it all before. You get busy at the office or taking the kids to their soccer game. A few hours go by and boom. You forgot to eat your fourth meal of the day. You get a little busy picking up the dry cleaning and now you have missed your fifth meal too. Now let's take a look at what happens to you when you skip a meal. First off when you skip meals it slows down your metabolic rate. When you slow down your metabolic rate through skipping meals, two wonderful things happen to you. First you go into a catabolic or muscle wasting state. When this happens your body breaks down your lean muscle tissue and converts it to glucose to provide your body with energy. Next since your brain thinks that you are starving to death it will tell your body to store any food that it does receive in the form of fat. So now you are losing valuable muscle tissue (and strength), as well as priming your body to increase its fat stores. Sounds great doesn't it? So this is why I tell my clients not to

skip meals and always plan ahead. When you have a major competition like a nationals or worlds right around the corner you don't want to the above happening to you.

#15

Eat a Big Breakfast

You must be thinking that the only thing on this guy's mind is food. Being a sports nutritionist, I usually eat 6-7 meals per day and in between I am discussing and counseling my athletes about proper meal planning. Yeah, I guess you are right. All I think about is food! Breakfast is not doubt one of the most important meals of the day. You should always eat a large breakfast as it is the base that will fuel you for the rest of the day. You have gone 8 hours during your sleep without food, so now is the time to fill up the tank with fuel once again before another long day of work and training. A lot of people either skip their breakfast or eat such a skimpy breakfast it makes you wonder how they can even think and function at their job. Having a cup of coffee and a muffin is not considered a breakfast, especially not for an athlete. At breakfast time you have to supply your body with a hearty source of complex and simple carbohydrates, and a nice portion of lean protein. A good example would be a large bowl of oatmeal with an apple and an egg white omelet. This is a breakfast, not that muffin and coffee joke that so many people fall in the trap of. The quality of your breakfast will have a direct effect on how efficient your metabolic rate works for the rest of the day. With this said, make sure that you eat a true athletes breakfast.

#16

Make sure your meals are balanced

“What type of balance are you talking about?” This refers to your macronutrient breakdown in each meal. Just as a refresher your macronutrients are your proteins, carbohydrates and fat. Each of your meal should be balanced in its proportion for each of the “Big Three”. Now don't think that there is only one macronutrient ratio profile that is going to be optimal for everyone because there isn't. This is where a customized nutritional plan comes into play. Each person's metabolic rate, energy expenditure, insulin resistance and insulin sensitivity level are different, just to name a few variables. These all play a major role in designing a customized nutritional plan that is right for you. I can give one athlete a specific ratio of macronutrients and he will get ripped by following it. Yet another individual that I give the exact same plan to will cause an increase in his body fat level. With this stated, I will at least give you something to start with as a base. First off, never just eat one macronutrient and consider it a meal. This means in layman's terms, don't go out and eat a pasta dinner with a nice half loaf of Italian bread. As you can see you are lacking protein and healthy fats in the meal. At the same time don't scarf down a can of tuna and call it a meal either. A good example to follow for dinner would be a lean steak, a yam, and a serving of broccoli with olive oil. This is a balanced meal. Now, I would play with the ratios of the macronutrients to exact specifications and amounts to help you achieve your future goal according to your personal data for the different variables. See, I know how to make it look easy!

Now you now know that going up a weight class isn't as easy as you once thought. It takes planning and precise calculations to go up to your next class without looking like you gained all your weight from binges at the local buffet. As you can see, there is a science to proper weight

gain, not simply stuffing your face with all types of fattening and sugar laden foods. All the while making sure you don't look like you have been on a serious diet of hot dogs and marshmallows. By the time you finish this chapter you will know the top 25 ways to put on solid muscle so that going up your weight class is a little more scientifically laid out than raiding your local "All you Can Eat" buffet a couple times a week.

17

Avoid Processed and Junk Foods

I know I will get a lot of flak for this one but I had to say it. When I hear most athletes discuss that they are going up a weight class it reminds me of children talking about how they are going to Disney Land. It's like they have just won the lottery. Just because you are going up a weight class doesn't mean you have a blank check to eat all the junk that you can get your hands on. I know this may sound funny, but it is a reality among a lot of athletes. Plain and simple, processed foods are not healthy for the body. When you look back to our ancestors they ate mainly foods in a natural state. They didn't eat things like potato chips, chocolate tacos, ice cream, chocolate bars, deli meats, candy, and all the other junk foods that people go crazy for. Let's face reality for a second here, these "nutritious foods" may help you get a bigger total in "Bizarro World", but I am sad to tell you they won't help your total in this one! Not only will these foods add an extra roll of fat around your waist, they will also increase your chances for a whole slew of health conditions including heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes among others.

#18

Schedule a Cheat Meal

"Did you just say cheat meal?" "I thought you told us not to eat all the bad foods that you mentioned above." Well, I do know that athletes are human after all, not strength cyborgs from another planet. Yes, I don't want unhealthy junk foods to be a regular part of your diet, but if I told you to have a total abstinence from the foods that you have loved all your life, you will give up before you get started. The point here with your scheduled cheat day is that you allow yourself one cheat meal per week. Note I said cheat meal, not cheat day. This will allow you once a week to eat whatever you want in a reasonable amount for one meal on your cheat day. The main purpose of this is to allow you to have a mental break from your daily nutritional plan. At the same time it lets you enjoy something you like and it will help keep you on track the rest of the week. And this also is very metabolically positive for your system. I have pulled sugars, salts, and bad fats out of your diet and your metabolism, however so slightly, has slowed because of the lesser amount of crap in your system. A jolt of the same crap will speed up your metabolism somewhat during the course of the week.

#19

Consume Your Healthy Fats

If you have been a regular reader of my column, than you already know my view on fat. The

type of fat that I will be discussing here is what is known in layman's terms as "Healthy Fats". These healthy fats include your Omega 3-6-9. The Omega 3 and 6 are known as polyunsaturated fats and the Omega 9 is known as monounsaturated fat. The Omega 3's are one of the most important since they have many benefits for the athlete. They increase insulin sensitivity, and reduce inflammation of your joints and tendons. Your Omega 9's are important since they contain oleic acid, which is known to keep the arteries of your heart supple, and they have a positive effect on your testosterone level. Carbohydrates and protein contain 4 calories per gram; while fat has over double that at 9 calories per gram. Not only will healthy fats help in many areas for health and strength, but also they will provide an excellent source of calories. One tablespoon of flax or olive oil contains 114 calories and 14 grams of fat. Just say yes to healthy fats to keep your weight and total climbing!

#20

Optimize Your Post Workout Nutrition

Now when I say the words post workout nutrition, what comes to your mind? Is it go home and eat what ever you like? Is it to hit the local Ice cream shop for a double scoop of chocolate fudge layered in marshmallows and sprinkles? Or is it something you have systematically and scientifically planned out to make sure that you are providing your body with the nutrients that it needs to gain benefit from that crazy workout that you just did? Now from most of the lifters that I have talked to, they don't have a clue what to eat after their workouts. They just go with the flow and eat whatever is lying around their house when they get home from their workouts, or whatever fast food drive thru is closest to the gym. This may sound funny but if this is you I will tell you straight. You are destroying all the hard work that you just performed by not supplying your body with what it needs at the most important time of the day. Post workout nutrition is much more complicated than just simply eating your piping hot dinner (what ever it may be) when you get home from the gym. You have to supply your body with quality protein and carbohydrates along with a multitude of micronutrients and nutrient partitioning agents if you are looking to get the most from your training. In a future issue I will be discussing post workout nutrition and how it applies to the athlete. Just remember if you don't think that your post workout nutrition plan is optimal, it most likely is giving your competition a major advantage come contest day!

#21

Prepare Your Foods Ahead of Time

You are probably wondering what this has to do with packing on mass. We are in a time when we are working more hours than we like, our family responsibilities are at an all time high, deadlines for work and life have to be met, and the amount of free time that we have for ourselves is very limited. With this in mind, I recommend for all my athletes to prepare their meals ahead of time. That is unless you live on a lavish estate where you have your very own servant and chef waiting on your every beck and call. Ok, back to reality here for a minute. The fact is if you try to stick to the guidelines that I have laid out for you in the past three articles of this series, it is unrealistic to think that you are going to prepare all of your foods on a daily basis every morning before going into the office. It's simply too much work to keep it up day after day. This is one of the reasons why many people fall off their diets, and fail to stick with their

plan. I suggest that you prepare your foods for 2-3 days in advance. A Sunday evening would be perfect for this. Prepare your different foods and put them into Tupperware containers in the fridge. Now have a separate set of Tupperware containers that you will bring to work in your cooler bag every day. Just bring them to work and nuke them for a few minutes and voila, you have a ready to go nutritious high protein, carbohydrate rich meal that will keep you fueled all day long. Do the same with your protein drinks. Pick up a few protein shaker bottles, which you can get at any GNC store. Put your protein powder in each bottle and throw them in your bag. At work, having a shake will be as simple as adding some water, shaking and drinking. All which can be done in under a minute's time. You have to make eating healthy convenient or you will turn into one of those individuals that tells everyone that you would like to eat healthy but it's just too time consuming. Yet these are the same individuals that spend 3 hours every night in front of the television to watch their favorite shows. You have to prioritize what is most important, and if you consider yourself a serious athlete than there is no way that you shouldn't be bringing your cooler bag to work with pre planned nutritious meals. If athletes of other sports can do this then there is no reason why athletes can't do it!

#22

Watch Your Alcohol Intake

I know that you didn't want to hear this one. One of the things that seem to increase with a lot of athletes of drinking age when they are trying to put on weight is that they jack up their alcohol intake. I have heard several lifters say things like the following. "Hey it will provide me with some extra calories to help pack the weight on." Yeah, extra weight on your waist and glutes! You will get extra calories, but they will be empty calories with absolutely no nutritional value. From a nutritional point of view we have to take a look at the macronutrient breakdown of different foods and from here we can choose whether they are a good or a bad choice. From here we can decide to include or avoid them in our nutritional plan. Let's take a look at the caloric intake of our macronutrients for a minute. Protein and carbohydrates have 4 calories per gram. Fat has 9 calories per gram. Alcohol on the other hand has 7 calories per gram! Isn't that crazy? Considering alcohol has almost as many calories per gram as pure fat, doesn't it make you wonder what it's going to do to not only the look of your physique but your athletic performance as well? Now here is another problem that most of you may not be thinking of. Protein and carbohydrates have a lot of performance benefits for the athlete. Protein will help increase lean muscle tissue, increase your metabolic rate, helps in the recovery process, and increases protein synthesis. Carbohydrates provide your body with an excellent energy source, replace muscle glycogen stores after tough workouts, helps in the recovery process, plays a major role in cell volumization, and keeps our thyroid hormones in check. Now, how does alcohol play a role in this picture? It doesn't play any nutritional role and this goes to show you that it shouldn't be a major staple in our diet. Now you might be saying that you saw a study that showed alcohol actually helped lower cholesterol levels in some individuals. This is when it is used in moderate amounts, not in the way that some lifters consume alcohol. This doesn't give you a valid excuse to go out on the weekend and get loaded on a Friday and Saturday. Don't get me wrong, if you consume alcohol in moderation it can have health benefits but the key word here is **MODERATION!**

#23

Increase Your Calories Gradually

When looking to increase your calories don't just jack them up like a maniac after reading this article. Don't go from your 3200-calorie diet and plan on attacking a 5500-calorie plan right off the bat. If you do you will be setting yourself up for disaster. Each week try to increase your daily caloric intake by 250-750 calories depending on your weight, energy expenditure, metabolic rate, and level of insulin sensitivity. You have to slowly increase your calories as your digestive system will just get overloaded and will not be able to process and absorb the nutrients from the massive increase in food volume. Take things in steps and you will eventually be where you need to be in no time.

#24

Take Extra Vitamin C

Unless you have been living under a rock for the last half-century, than you probably already know that Vitamin C has a positive effect on our immune system. There always seems to be mainstream media coverage on how this wonder vitamin can help you fight off the dreaded cold. Yes, the immune system boosting properties of Vitamin C are one of the reasons why I recommend its use but there is a lot more to this vitamin than what they tell you on TV. One very important benefit to Vitamin C is the effects that it has on cortisol levels. Cortisol is a catabolic hormone and is one that you want to minimize in your body. Its job is to breakdown valuable muscle tissue and increase fat storage. Sounds good if you want to be fat and weak! Vitamin C has been shown to reduce cortisol production. If that's not enough it has also been shown to increase the athlete's favorite hormone...TESTOSTERONE! Now I have your attention don't I? Yes, Vitamin C has shown to not only keep the "Cortisol Monster" at bay but at the same time it has a positive effect on testosterone levels as well. One important function of vitamin C is in the formation and maintenance of collagen. This is the basis of connective tissue, which is found in skin, ligaments, cartilage, vertebral discs, joint linings, capillary walls, and your bones and teeth. Taking extra Vitamin C when going through a pre contest athletic cycle is an excellent idea to help your body repair and recover from all the stress you put upon it. These are just a few of the many reasons why athletes need to supplement with extra Vitamin C.

#25

Stay Dedicated

Without dedication to not only your training but your nutritional and supplementation program, you will never see the results that you deserve. With athletes I have noticed that many will stick to the training program that they have laid out for their upcoming competition, but yet many get lazy when it is time to put the same effort forth for their nutritional program. Now you might be thinking that all this nutritional stuff is just for those bodybuilders and it really has nothing to do with the sports in general. Well, I'll let you in on something. I believe that nutrition is even more important for the athlete than the bodybuilder. The main problem in sports is that since we don't have to have a ripped midsection when we step on stage that gives us the green light to go and eat what ever we like. This is not the case and if you are of this mentality then I can guarantee that no matter how hard you train, no matter who your coach is, no matter how fine tuned your

bench shirt is, you will never reach your optimal potential in this sport. I am currently working with some of the best athletes in the state both men and women. I am working with athletes at such an elite level you would think that they have basically reached their limit in terms of their potential. Well guess what, many of them are just scratching the surface in what they can accomplish in this sport. Many of them didn't have an optimal nutritional program when they came to me for counseling and program design. The fact that I have seen many of my world-class athletes make unbelievable gains in such a short time is due to the fact that once your nutritional plan is customized to your individual needs, the results will be very surprising! If customizing the plan of World-class athletes is causing them to have exceptional gains and helping them overcome plateaus, just think of what optimizing your nutritional plan could do for you!

Peanut Butter: A Super Sports Food

In this day and age of energy bars, protein powders and weight gain shakes, many athletes forget about "real" foods, such as peanut butter. Peanut butter, in my opinion, is one of the best sports foods around. It's tasty, inexpensive, satisfying, nourishing and even good for our health. But all too often, I hear athletes say "I don't keep peanut butter in my house. It's too fatty, too fattening." or "I ration peanut butter to once per week on my Sunday morning bagel." They try to stay away from peanut butter. That's nuts!

Yes, peanut butter is calorie-dense. But it can beneficially fit into your sports diet. The following information explains why I vote peanut butter (and all nuts and nut butters, for that matter) to be a super sports food for athletes who want to eat well and invest in their health.

- Peanut butter is satiating and satisfying ... perfect for dieters. Because you will never win the war against hunger, your best bet is to eat foods that keep you feeling fed. This means, foods with protein and fiber like peanut butter (and nuts, in general). You'll feel fuller for longer if you have half a whole-wheat bagel with peanut butter, as compared to the same amount of calories of a plain white bagel. The protein and fiber in peanut butter "sticks to your ribs" and is not fattening unless you overeat total calories that day.

A Perdue University study reports subjects who ate peanuts every day did not overeat daily calories. (Kirkmeyer, *Int'l J Obesity* 24:1167, 2000) Peanut eaters tend to naturally eat less at other times of the day. (Alper, *Int'l J Obesity* 26:1129, 2002) Plus, if you enjoy what you are eating on your reducing diet, you'll stay with the food plan and be able to keep the weight off. This is far better than yo-yo dieting!

- Peanut butter is a quick and easy way to reduce your risk of heart disease. Just slap together a peanut butter (and honey or jelly) sandwich on multi-grain bread, and you have the makings of a heart-healthy meal, if not a childhood memory. A quick and easy peanut butter sandwich is healthier, by far, than a fast food burger or fried chicken dinner and far better than, let's say, an equally easy "meal" of chips or ice cream. That's because peanut butter offers health-protective mono- and polyunsaturated oil. Trading burgers (saturated fat) for peanut butter sandwiches reduces your risk of developing heart disease. In fact, the more often you eat peanut butter (and nuts), the lower your risk of heart disease. (Hu, *J Am College Nutr* 20(1):5, 2001) Start spreading peanut butter (instead of butter) on toast. Enjoy PB & banana for a "decadent" snack in place of ice cream.

- Peanut butter is an affordable source of calories. If you are a hungry athlete who needs 3,000 or more calories a day, you can spend a significant amount of money fueling yourself (especially if you routinely eat protein bars, weight gain shakes and other engineered sports foods). Peanut butter can fuel your body without breaking the bank. One hundred calories of peanut butter (about 1 tablespoon) costs about 7¢, far less than 100 calories of other protein sources, such as cottage cheese (55¢ per 100 calories), tuna (60¢) and deli turkey breast (75¢). The cost of 200 calories of peanut butter is about 15¢, far less than the \$1.49 you'd spend on 200 calories of an energy bar... and generally, the peanut butter is far tastier!

- Peanut butter is a source of protein, needed to build and repair muscles. But take note: peanut butter is not protein-dense. That is, two tablespoons of peanut butter, the amount in an average sandwich, provides about 7 grams of protein. In comparison, the calorie equivalent of turkey in a sandwich offers about 20 grams of protein. Athletes who weigh 140 pounds may need 100 to 180 grams protein per day; 200-pound athletes, 200 to 250 grams. For 100 grams of protein, you'd have to eat the whole jar of peanut butter! Unlikely!

To boost the protein value of peanut butter, simply accompany it with a tall glass of milk: a PB &J sandwich + 16 ounces low fat milk = 28 grams of protein, a good chunk of your daily requirement. Milk simultaneously enhances the value of the protein in the peanut butter sandwich. That is, peanuts are low in some of the essential amino acids muscles need for growth and repair. The amino acids in milk (as well as those in the sandwich bread) nicely complement the limiting amino acids in peanuts.

- Peanut butter is a reasonable source of vitamins, minerals and other health-protective food compounds. For example, peanut butter contains folate, vitamin E, magnesium and resveratrol, all nutrients associated with reduced risk of heart disease. Magnesium is also associated with reduced risk of adult-onset diabetes. Peanut butter offers a small amount of zinc, a mineral important for healing and strengthening the immune system. As an athlete, you need all these nutrients to keep you off the bench and on the playing field.

- Peanut butter contains fiber--not a lot (1 gram per tablespoon) but some. Fiber in food contributes to a feeling of fullness that can help dieters eat less without feeling hungry. Fiber also promotes regular bowel movements and helps reduce problems with constipation. By enjoying peanut butter on whole grain bread, you can contribute 6 to 8 grams of fiber towards the recommended target of 20 to 35 grams fiber per day.

- Peanuts contain mostly health-protective mono- and polyunsaturated fats. When peanuts are made into commercial peanut butter (such as Skippy or Jif), some of the oil gets converted into a harder, saturated fat. This keeps the oil from separating to the top. The hardened oil, called trans-fat, is less healthful. But the good news is, commercial peanut butters contain only a tiny amount of trans fats and just a small amount of (naturally occurring) saturated fat. For example, only 3.5 of the 17 grams fat in two tablespoons of Skippy are "bad." To minimize your intake of even this small amount of unhealthful fat, you can buy all-natural peanut butter. If you dislike the way the oil in this type of peanut butter separates to the top of the jar, simply store the jar upside down. That way, the oil rises to what becomes the bottom of the jar when you turn it over to open it. And if you eat peanut butter daily, you won't have to refrigerate it, thereby making the all-natural

peanut butter easier to spread.

- Caution: Peanut butter is a poor source of the carbohydrates needed for muscle fuel. Don't try to subsist on peanut butter by the spoonful! Luckily, peanut butter combines nicely with banana, bread, apples, oatmeal, crackers, raisins, and even pasta (as in Thai noodle dishes). These combinations will balance your sports diet.