Heart-Healthy Eating if You Are Underweight
Advice from the National Lipid Association Clinician’s Lifestyle Modification Toolbox

Why Choose a Heart-Healthy Eating Pattern if You are Underweight?
A body mass index, or BMI, less than 18.5 means you are underweight. Your health care provider can help you figure out your BMI. You can also use a BMI calculator at www.smartbmicalculator.com. Some people have a lower body weight naturally and are healthy at this weight. But if you are underweight from not eating enough, or from illness or stress, you may be at risk for health problems. Your health care provider can find out if you have health problems at your check-ups. If you have a low BMI, the goal is to gain weight in a healthy way. Choose high-calorie foods that are also heart-healthy. It may also help if you eat smaller meals and healthy snacks more often. Light physical activity like walking will help your overall health. Light strength-training exercise can protect your bones and muscles. Try the steps below to gain weight in a heart-healthy way.

Tips for Gaining Weight in a Heart-Healthy Way

Start slow and keep a food journal
- Write down what you eat for 3 days
- Look to see where you can add foods to boost calories

Eat meals more often
- Try to eat 5-6 healthy meals and snacks each day
- Make meals with lean protein and low-fat dairy foods, raw or unsalted nuts, whole grain breads and cereals, vegetables, and fruits

Eat healthy, high-calorie snacks
- Snack on dried fruit and granola
- Try meal replacement drinks or bars
- Make fruit and veggie smoothies with low-fat plain yogurt, nut butters, and/or avocado

Add healthy fats to meals and snacks
- Use canola oil or extra-virgin olive oil with vegetables, pastas, and salads
- Add avocados to meals and snacks
- Snack on unsalted nuts and seeds and natural nut butters

Save drinks for the end of meals
- Drink liquids at the end of meals to avoid feeling full quickly
- Avoid sugary or low-calorie drinks with little nutrition
- Choose low-fat milk or 100% fruit juice

Be active each day
- Do light aerobic exercises like walking
- Try to do strength training with light weights

Meal and Snack Ideas for Gaining Weight in a Healthy Way

Breakfast – Granola with Plain Yogurt + Berries + Raw or Unsalted Nuts OR Scrambled Egg with 1 oz. Cheese, Whole-Grain Toast with 1 Tbsp. Almond Butter + Fruit
Mid-Morning Snack – Whole-Grain Bread with 1 Tbsp. Peanut Butter OR Avocado Smoothie made with Fruit and Plain Low-Fat Yogurt
Lunch – Grilled Chicken Sandwich on Whole-Grain Bread with Lettuce, Tomato, and Hummus + Fresh Fruit
Mid-Afternoon Snack – Dried Fruit + Raw or Unsalted Nuts or Peanuts
Dinner – Grilled Salmon with Yogurt-Dill Sauce + Wild Rice + Asparagus grilled in Extra-Virgin Olive Oil OR Whole-Wheat Pasta + Ground Turkey Marinara + Mixed Green Salad with Vinaigrette Dressing
Snack – 1 oz. Skim-Milk Mozzarella Cheese Stick + Whole-Grain Crackers + Fresh Fruit OR 1 oz. unsalted nuts

A registered dietitian nutritionist can help you make a heart-healthy meal plan that works best for your lifestyle, and support you in your journey to a healthful dietary pattern.

This information is part of the Clinician’s Lifestyle Modification Toolbox courtesy of the National Lipid Association.