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Top 6 Tips for Building Muscle & Losing Fat



1. Lift heavy things

Strength training is the trigger for building lean muscle mass. The greater the demand on your muscles, the more muscle tissue breakdown occurs = the greater the gains/growth of new muscle.

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Bonus: muscle is more thermogenically active than fat, which means it requires more energy to sustain. Therefore the more muscle mass you have, the higher your resting metabolic rate is (that is, the higher the amount of calories you burn at rest). It's a win-win! Talk to a coach or personal trainer about creating/increasing the demand of your workouts to optimize muscle growth.

2. HIIT training

You might think that steady state cardio is best for burning fat, however studies consistently confirm that HIIT (high intensity interval training), like the metcons you do in Crossfit, are superior for overall calorie burn and long term metabolic improvements. It's a little sciencey, but here's why:

When you train at high intensities, your body is only able to break down and convert carbs into fuel for that training. Not fat, just carbs. No matter how 'fat adapted' you try to become (that's a whole 'nother convo!), physiologically it ain't happening. Studies show again and again that anything over 65% of VO2 max (known as the 'crossover point'), that training will use carbs as fuel.

On the other hand, when training at a low-moderate intensity, your body is able to break down and use fat as fuel, in addition to carbs. Cool, right? Fat is exactly what we're trying to burn off here.

But wait... there's a catch (two of them actually).

First, you don't burn as many total calories working at lower intensities. Think about it. Thirty minutes of an easy-ish moderate steady-state jog, I know for me that'll burn about 300 calories. Thirty minutes full-on sprint intervals with rest periods in between, I'm burning closer to 500 calories. So more calories overall are burned - sure less of them are directly coming from fat during the workout, but still more overall - which will be contributing to my total energy expenditure at the end of the day, which does in fact, promote fat loss.

Secondly, the higher intensity my workout is, the greater my excess post-exercise oxygen consumption (EPOC), also referred to as the 'after burn'. EPOC is the result of an elevation in oxygen consumption and metabolism which occurs after high intensity exercise as the body continues requiring increased energy resources for recovery, repair, and returning to its pre-exercise state. This period can last as long as 24 hours and guess what is fuelling this period? F-A-T.

So when looking at the bigger picture, comparing steady state to higher intensity interval type training - the sum of both the training session itself and the post-training EPOC period, **HIIT burns more calories AND more fat overall.**

3. Eat the right amount of calories for your needs

There are formulas that can help you determine how much energy (aka calories) your body requires, and a [qualified nutritionist](#) can help you manipulate those numbers to support your specific body composition goals.

Step 1 is to ensure you never eat below your BMR (basal metabolic rate), which is a measure of how much your body requires just to function properly and stay healthy.

Step 2 is to then ensure you're getting the extra calories you need to support your additional energy expenditure in a day from your general activity and athletic training.

Finally, step 3 is to adjust those numbers slightly to support muscle gain and/or fat loss, without jeopardizing step 1 - the crucial BMR. The common mistake many people make is to create too large of a calorie deficit, which makes it really hard to sustain. The big risk is that too large of a deficit will result in a loss of muscle mass - the opposite of what we want!

To ensure your weight loss is fat loss, while maintaining and yes, even building lean muscle, seek qualified nutritional support. Book your personalized [1:1 Nutrition Consultation](#) to determine your individual energy needs and how to best manipulate them to support your goals.

4. Eat sufficient protein

Protein provides the building blocks of ALL tissues and cells in the body - not just muscle, but hormones, neurotransmitters, blood cells, and more. Not surprising, it's the macronutrient that is most deficient in people's diets, athletes and non-athletes alike.

From an athletic and body composition standpoint, however, protein is crucial. Improving your body composition means increasing your lean muscle mass. That takes strength training. And to provide the building blocks required to repair the muscle damage caused by your strength training, sufficient dietary protein intake is a must.



Your protein intake needs will depend on:

- the type, frequency and intensity of your training
- your age (we become less efficient at using our protein as we age, so we need to eat more)
- your experience level (a beginner athlete will have higher muscle breakdown, so will need to eat more of it)
- your goals (ie: increased protein improves fat loss)

[Your nutritionist](#) can help you determine your protein needs, but expect that somewhere between 20-30% of your total daily calories should come from protein.

5. Eat sufficient carbohydrates

Remember back in tip #2, we talked about carbs and fats being used as fuel for your training? Carbohydrates are your body's preferred fuel source. They are used in both aerobic and anaerobic exercise, and they are the ONLY fuel available during anaerobic or higher intensity training. So they're kind of a big deal.

Sure, keeping them in check (making sure you're not eating too many for your needs, and that you're eating good quality ones) is important. But reducing them too much will sabotage your efforts, and will increase the risk of lean muscle being lost (as the body will break it down for energy when the carb energy isn't there). Good quality carbs are crucial to building and maintaining muscle mass.



- You've broken down your muscle during your workout (the brick wall is your muscle belly). It now needs repair.
- You need to get the fallen protein bricks back on the muscle to repair it and make it stronger.
- But those bricks will not get there themselves. They need something to do the work. They need carbs. Carbs are your construction worker.

Again, a [qualified nutritionist](#) can help determine your carbohydrate needs, but typically an average of 40-55% of your total daily calories should come from carbohydrates.

6. Throw away your scale

You know it. Although the number on the scale can fluctuate often, sometimes even a lot - it tells us nothing about your total muscle mass, segmental muscle mass, the amount and location of your body fat, nor your water composition. The BIA (bioelectrical impedance analysis) stand-on scales you can buy only give you a tiny fraction of the information that the InBody 570 scan does.

Seeing accurate indicators of real change in your body composition every 4-8 weeks helps you adjust your training and nutrition programming to progress toward your health, physique and performance goals.

You know what they say, 'You cannot manage what you don't measure' - so let's measure the things that show what you're really made of and guide you to create the optimal body composition you're after!



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Yvette has spent decades working and playing in the fitness space, is a retired Figure Pro, and now enjoys pushing a balance of Crossfit workouts, walking, and gardening at her oceanfront home on Vancouver Island. BUILD Nutrition provides a variety of online and in-person nutrition services, including an extensive resource membership, [RxGRIT](#). Find her and learn more at www.buildnutrition.ca.