

Ask Leyla: Why can't I build muscle?



Q: Why is it so difficult for some people to build muscle? I have been lifting weights for 20 years and have seen no increase whatsoever in my arms and legs. My son has the same problem. I have had testosterone treatment with no results. I am 140 lbs. and 5'10" in height.

A: My first question to you is: What type of diet are you on? Given that your BMI is 20, which is pretty lean for a 5'10" man, I'm suspicious that you may not be getting enough calories and especially protein for the weight training you're doing. A comprehensive nutrition workup including DHEA levels will reveal if you have sarcopenia (diminishing muscle) as well as any micronutrient deficiencies.



I would expect an avid runner to weigh 140 lbs. at your height, not a strength trainer. Since muscle weighs more than fat, those who weight train regularly will tend to weigh more and have a higher BMI as a result.

How much protein is sufficient for your training? One to 1.2 grams of protein per kilogram. Some may argue that 1.5 grams per kg is better. You weigh 63.6 kg so an appropriate range would be 63 to 95 grams of protein per day (140 lbs. divided by 2.2 lbs. = 63.6 kg). That's 3.5 to about 5 ounces of high biological value (HBV) protein per meal. HBV protein comes from meat, poultry, fish, eggs and cheese.

The addition of whey protein to your diet would be helpful. Whey protein contains the branched chain amino acids (BBCAs) leucine, isoleucine and valine, which help build lean body mass and repair the micro tears in muscles that occur with weight training.

The second question is: Are you hauling enough weight? And how would you know if you are? The last 2-3 repetitions of each set should be very difficult to complete. Otherwise, you're not challenging your muscles enough. As you get stronger, the amount of weight you're lifting should increase so you are continually challenged. I would recommend checking in with a qualified personal trainer for an assessment of your strength and form.