Boosting Calories and Nutrition

Food and beverages that are dense in calories, protein and healthy fats can help to promote healthy weight gain. When trying to gain weight, aim to make the most of every bite and aim for a consistent daily intake.

Make the Most of Breakfast!
Plan for and allow enough time EVERY DAY for a wholesome breakfast including a cup of milk (2% or whole milk) and calorie-dense foods. Try to include at least 2-3 food groups. Here are some breakfast ideas:
- Egg sandwich with cheese on biscuit, croissant, bagel
- Toast with peanut butter and jelly or nutella
- French Toast, pancakes or waffles with butter and syrup
- Homemade quick bread or muffin - healthier options include fruit or vegetable ingredients, such as banana walnut, blueberry, pumpkin walnut and zucchini chocolate chip
- Bowl of granola, walnuts and fruit topped with yogurt or milk

No time for breakfast? Use Carnation Essentials mixed with 2% or whole milk and take a baggie of dry cereal, nuts/seeds and dried fruit. If traditional breakfast foods are not working, try non-breakfast foods, such as a favorite sandwich, grilled cheese, leftover pizza or leftover dinner foods.

Keep a Structured Schedule
- Aim for 3 meals and 2-3 snacks each day to help avoid long stretches without eating. Keep meals and snacks to 30 minutes. Avoid grazing which can lead to poor appetite at meals. Alternatively if meals aren't working try 5-6 mini-meals.
- For snacks, or mini-meals, aim for at least 2-3 food groups, such as peanut butter (protein) with crackers (grain), tortillas (grain) with melted cheese (dairy) and salsa (vegetable), bowl of cereal (grain) with milk (dairy), etc.
- Offer meal-type foods after school instead of snack items.
- Plan a family dinner with at least 3-4 food groups, including protein (meat, chicken, fish or legumes), vegetables and grain/starch (pasta, rice, potato), and a cup of milk.

Focus on Nutrient Dense Beverages
A consistent beverage intake with nutrient-dense drinks can make a big nutritional difference.
- Aim for 3-4 cups 2% or whole milk EVERY DAY.
- Try a homemade milkshake, smoothie, Boost Plus or Carnation Essentials – often the best time to add this is when foods wouldn't otherwise be eaten.
- Offer liquids after the meal to optimize appetite for food.
- Avoid low calorie beverages such as juice, diet drinks and water

A Bedtime Snack is a Must
Plan for a balanced bedtime snack, or mini-meal, such as peanut butter or cheese on toast or crackers, nuts, or ice cream, or any favorite wholesome snack will work.

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Try These Calorie and Nutrient Dense Food Ideas:

- Peanut butter or other nut butters (100 calories per tablespoon)
    - Spread on crackers, toast, bagels, English muffins, apples, bananas, celery.

- Nuts and Seeds (190 calories per ¼ cup)
    - Try peanuts, pistachios, almonds, cashews – eat alone or mixed in a homemade trail mix. Add to cereal or in recipes.
    - Add seeds to salads or just eat alone.

- Dried fruit (120 calories per ¼ cup)
    - Try raisins, craisins, dried apricots, mango, banana, and yogurt covered berries. Add dried fruit to cereal, yogurt, salad or in recipes.

- Oil (40 calories per tablespoon)
    - Toss pasta in olive or canola oil before adding sauce. Add to other cooked grains, such as rice, quinoa, couscous, faro, etc.
    - Sautee vegetables in oil. Pan fried potatoes/home fries. Fried zucchini, mushrooms, eggplant and onion rings.

- Mayonnaise (90 calories per tablespoon)
    - Spread generously on sandwiches.
    - Egg salad, chicken salad or tuna salad made with mayo.
    - Potato salad or pasta salad made with mayo.

- Cheese (100 calories per ounce)
    - Snack on string cheese or cheese slices. Serve with crackers or melt on top of tortillas and serve with avocado or guacamole.
    - Add shredded mozzarella cheese to vegetables such as broccoli, pasta, rice, casseroles, sauces, baked potato. Add extra cheese to pizza.
    - Eat desserts with cheese (cheesecake, Danish).

- Ice cream, pudding, and desserts can be eaten liberally for added calories, but do not use these foods to replace nutrient dense meals.