



# Bulking Up- Always A Bad Idea For Bodybuilding

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*How do we learn? Most often by failing, and making mistakes, by falling and picking ourselves up, but what is most important is being able to realize that there is a need for change and then being able to implement it, I hope this piece about the dangers of bulking up and the mistakes that I made over the years can help turn on a light for those that still follow the practice.*

The major mistake that so many (myself included a decade or so ago) make is that we go with an idea that if we get as big as possible and then cut down, that we will build more muscle and look better in the process. There are some serious flaws though, with that way of thinking, but before even delving into these aspects, I think it important to note the reality of what bulking up truly is, namely another way of saying that you are not going to really pay attention to not eating foods that are not good for you and that you don't mind gaining a few pounds in the process. Without any consideration for cosmetic nor strength gains, it is inherent upon the individual to first honestly reflect on their motivation, and see it for what it truly is. Is it a matter of trying to get big and ripped at all costs, and if so, does that justify eating foods that are not good for you? The contradictions are many when you look objectively at the issue, and it is often softened by justifying statements such as "a little junk food won't hurt you", or the popular, "cheating on your diet is good for you, and helps you lose weight."

I think it is important to understand that it does not matter whether the consumption of junk food can help you in your goals or not, any food not a part of a natural human's diet, simply should not be ingested, as it will do some harm to your body. There is no real standard of moderation and tolerance with regards to food in our society, however there is a hypocritical negativity and stigma placed on substance abuse, and even cigarette and nicotine addictions. From both an ethical and biochemical standpoint, there is not difference between the two. Someone knowingly eating a food that contains harmful substances such as trans fats, corn syrup, monosodium glutamate and its artificial glutamic acid derivatives or that contains unhealthy concentrations of salt, sugars and fats, is the same as a cigarette smoker, or someone abusing illegal or pharmaceutical drugs from a moral standpoint, (if such a position really exists- my personal view is that it is a mistake in any case to attach moral implications of character to any type of addictive behavior, as there are always factors that precede the actions, and moreover, that such declarations are to me no more than ways of expressing insecurity and a need for superiority on the part of the speaker.)

Biochemically, ingesting a substance, or food containing harmful ingredients, or a food that is inherently bad for your body is no different than smoking a cigarette in terms of the idea that they are both actions where the body is knowingly exposed to something that will bring about a negative reaction on some level, but that the pleasure derived from the action is given a higher level of importance. Those of us with an experience in working out are even more aware of the dangers of eating the wrong foods, we look at the epidemic of cardiovascular disease, Type II diabetes and hypertension and know fully well that the consumption of the very foods that we use to bulk up are responsible, but yet we insulate ourselves from that point of fact, as if our training somehow ingrains us with an immunity from the effects of bad foods. It does not.

Unfortunately, the studies have been very much conclusive about the dangers of having your body-weight fluctuate with regards to the increased risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer and an earlier overall mortality rate <sup>1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8</sup>. We think so often in terms of muscle mass and getting big and muscular that we forget the whole idea of health and fitness, an irony that is not at all to be ignored. I know from personal experience that I would go as high as 252 lbs in the off season, when such a thing existed for

me, and then crash down to just about 211lbs come contest time, and then go back up again by eating pretty much everything in sight, with little thought as to what I was eating, mass and strength were the main focus. At the time, the pursuit of the trophies and the bigger and better physique were the motivating factors, and at no time did I even stop to contemplate what I was doing. Intellectually I was very much aware that weight fluctuation was not a good idea, but it was part of bodybuilding tradition and thus exempt from such trivial things such as the well being of the human body. As time went on, however, I rationalized that this contradiction was not at all acceptable and that my health should indeed come before any gains in muscle I might put on during the off-season from bulking up, and so reluctantly, I stopped, and started a path that has lead me to where I am today.

What followed however, was that by staying at my contest weight, and eating properly (and by that I do not at all mean the insanity of skinless chicken breast cutlets and countless cans of tuna fish and rice cakes, as that is not by any stretch within the definition of proper eating for the human body) - I actually gained more muscle than when I bulked up. Bulk up, I had a layer of fat around my stomach that I did not exactly find favorable, and then in the cutting down process, I really didn't gain much, even when I did it slowly and carefully over the course of months, the increased muscle that I expected was never there, instead I felt miserable, and soon came to the understanding that all I really gained from bulking up was fat and water, and that the magically muscle that was supposed to go on as a result never actually materialized. In the end I came to the conclusion that many successful bodybuilding champions came to, and that is that the ideology of bulking up is one that works only perhaps with the chemically enhanced, and has little merit for the individual training without the assistance of anabolic drugs. (I would have numerous conversations and powwows with my good friend, and who I consider to have been one of the greatest natural bodybuilding athletes of all time, Kai Greene, about this, and we had both come to the same conclusion, through trial and error, and we remarked at the commonality of this practice among all the natural pros, one of them being our friend, mentor and inspiration, Bernard Sealy, who won the Mr. World Championships in 1989, became and successfully competed as an IFBB pro-drug free.)

What I found was that not only did I gain more by staying at a lower bodyweight, but also that I was much stronger when eating properly on my diet at all times at 215- 220lbs than I was at 250lbs. (I credit my first workout video as my own personal validation of this as I had to stay in shape for months as I got it all together and I was able to lift poundages in the video far greater than I ever did when I was thirty pounds heavier. I could not curl the 120lb dumbbells when I was bulked up, nor could I easily press the 140lb for reps when I was heavier, and I was a s surprised as everyone else when I was able to move those weights in front of the camera. Today I can lift even more, and I am still getting stronger as the days turn into months and the months turn into years.) I attribute as well my progress as well to the cessation of those insidious protein drinks and supplements, which in hindsight, didn't do much of anything save make it easier for me to fatten up in the off season a lot faster. There is a taboo almost around staying on a diet indefinitely, and I think that it is important firstly to define what a diet really is, in my case, a way of eating that only allows for foods that are wholesome and that have been a historical part of the homo sapiens food intake, with the omission and general avoidance of any processed foods. That I look better now, and am bigger and stronger and more cut than I ever was when following the bulk up –cut down cycle is really not the issue, nor is the issue the fact that I look better now than the way I looked for any contest that I ever won over the years. Those are cosmetic points of view and are superficial at best, what is important is that I feel better, have more energy, and am in a more balanced and harmonious relationship with my body at all times, where its welfare takes precedence over any idea of achieving a certain look.

The biggest irony is that in following such a health conscious path, I was able to find the way towards physical accomplishment that I believed was only possible through somewhat self destructive means. It is a path that has worked not only for me but for all that have found themselves in my charge preparing for contests over the past five years or so, and it has proven itself to be a truth. From a

bodybuilding or competitive standpoint, if you can't flex it, it isn't worth having it on your body, but more importantly, it is incumbent upon us not to work so hard at achieving physical excellence that in our need for the extreme we lose sight of what is essential and what is real, namely our health, and that in the end the way towards being good to your body and looking good are very much the same.

Excelsior.

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Information contained in this article is not meant to treat, diagnose illness, nor substitute for medical counsel and is intended for purposes of information and education only. Consult your physician before modifying your diet or starting any exercise program.

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