#LIFEHACKS

What should a gym-going man actually eat?



Walking into a gym is often the easy part. Figuring out what to eat afterwards, how much protein to consume. And whether to give up rice altogether can be far more confusing.

For men trying to lose weight, the advice usually sounds simple: eat less, cut carbohydrates, and increase protein. Those looking to build muscle are told to eat more, load up on protein, and buy supplements. Following this without understanding how food works makes fitness goals harder to reach.

Diet and exercise need to work together. An hour at the gym means little if the rest of the day is spent eating without a plan.

Ruslan Hossain, a prominent Bangladeshi bodybuilder, estimates that diet accounts for 80 per cent of achieving fitness goals, with exercise making up the remaining 20 per cent.

Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin, Chief Clinical Dietitian and Head of the Dietetics and Nutrition Department at Continental Hospital PLC, believes that diet and exercise are both important — they have to run in parallel.

Losing fat: Eat less, but eat properly

For someone trying to lose body fat, the starting point is a calorie deficit, which means consuming fewer calories than the body uses.

Ruslan Hossain suggests that a daily deficit of around 500 calories can lead to roughly one pound of weight loss per week. He cautions, however, against treating weight loss as a simple equation, since the quality of food and how it is cooked also matter.

He recommends prioritising protein and complex carbohydrates, with a split of 40 per cent protein, 40 per cent carbohydrates and 20 per cent fat, although he acknowledges that individual requirements vary.

Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin challenges a common belief among Bangladeshi gym-goers: that rice makes you gain weight.



"One misconception in our country is that rice is responsible for gaining weight," she points out. "No, it's not. Overall calorie consumption, cooking methods, and cooking oils are also very important."

Instead of cutting rice, she recommends watching portions and choosing protein sources such as fish, chicken breast, eggs, milk, yoghurt and chickpeas, along with regular vegetables.

Both interviewees also warn against crash dieting. Drastic cuts may bring quick results but are hard to maintain, and Hossain says people often regain the weight, making later attempts harder. Hasin adds that the body adapts to prolonged restriction. A moderate deficit that can be sustained is the better aim.

Building muscle: Protein is important, but not everything

Building muscle calls for a different approach. More protein alone is not enough; the body also needs sufficient calories and carbohydrates to support training and recovery.

Hasin identifies three requirements: progressive training, adequate protein, and sufficient rest. For healthy adults who exercise regularly, she cites an international recommendation of 1.4 to 2 grams per kilogram of body weight daily, provided kidney function is normal. A man weighing 70 kilograms would need roughly 98 to 140 grams a day.

Carbohydrates matter too. They fuel workouts and replenish muscle glycogen, the stored form of glucose that muscles use during exercise.

Hossain recommends a slight calorie surplus but warns against overeating. He stresses, "One thing to make sure is that resistance training is a must when it comes to muscle building."

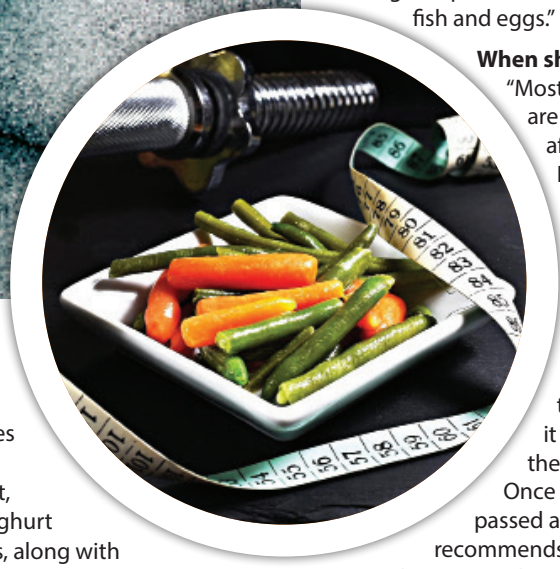
Do you really need protein powder?

Protein supplements are a familiar sight in gyms, and many men assume building muscle requires a tub of whey.

Both say food should come first.

Hossain's view is that gym-goers here usually have access to good protein sources like meat, fish and eggs. Supplements only make sense for those who cannot meet their needs that way, such as people who spend long hours outside, and the diet comes first. "They should include protein in their diet at first, and then if they need more they should turn to supplements."

Hasin's advice is similar. "I would recommend getting an adequate amount of protein through diet," she shares, "by eating rich protein sources such as meat, fish and eggs."



When should you eat?

"Most important meals are the ones before and after the workout," Ruslan Hossain notes. The one before, he adds, "is going to fuel the workout."

Hasin gets more specific as she adds, "We should stop eating any food that has calories in it 30 minutes before the workout session."

Once 30 minutes have passed after exercise, she recommends a protein-rich meal and urges regular times for both meals and workouts.

Beyond that, total protein across the day matters more than any exact post-gym window.

Stop treating carbohydrates as the enemy

Hossain observes that men dieting here treat carbs as the enemy and leave out rice and other carbohydrates first. Hasin warns that swapping rice for bread achieves little, since bread has similar amounts of calories.

She also finds meal skipping very common and warns against randomly dieting in the morning only to consume large amounts of calories later in the day.

Then there is what happens outside the gym. "We should stay active throughout the day," Hasin advises, rather than spend an hour at the gym and stay sedentary all day.

There is no single diet that works for every man who goes to the gym. Fat loss and muscle gain call for different calorie and protein targets. But neither requires abandoning familiar Bangladeshi meals or spending a fortune on supplements.

Balanced meals, controlled portions, enough protein and regular exercise are better starting points than chasing quick results.

By Mehdi Islam Mahi