

PASTA

Physique-Builders: Pasta's lowbrow image has many trainees forgoing it in favor of chicken. Too bad, since pasta's complex carbs are a great fuel source that frees up amino acids (from the aforementioned bird) to be used for muscle growth. "The plentiful B vitamins in pasta help create energy from food," Gidus says.

Physique-Killers: Food manufacturers have beat up this Italian classic by milling and refining it, turning it into a fiberless, calorically dense product with a much higher glycemic index than it needs. The upshot: It's more likely to pad your abs than your muscles. What's more, eating more quick-digesting carbs can lead to fatty liver disease, which can result in liver failure, reports a study in *Obesity*.

Smart Play: Choose pasta made from a whole grain such as whole wheat, brown rice or spelt that's listed as the *first* ingredient. This ensures your bowl contains more fiber and bodybuilding-friendly nutrients such as magnesium, vitamin E and selenium.

Gidus explains: "Eating pasta with a source of protein like meat sauce slows carbohydrate digestion for more sustained energy." Postworkout is a good time to take advantage of regular pasta's ability to boost insulin levels and drive aminos into muscle cells. However, at other meals, choose whole-grain varieties.

May We Suggest: Healthy Harvest Omega-3 Whole Wheat Rotini (healthyharvestpasta.com), 2 oz.: 180 calories, 7 g protein, 41 g carbs, 2 g fat (0 g saturated)



SALAD DRESSING

Physique-Builders: Dressings made with vegetable oils like olive oil are chock full of unsaturated fats that can promote fat-burning and healthy cholesterol levels. These same fats improve the absorption of fat-soluble antioxidants found in vegetables, such as beta-carotene. Olive oil goes one step further, dishing out the natural anti-inflammatory oleocanthal.

Physique-Killers: In similar fashion to peanut butter, many low-fat and fat-free dressings are simply pumped with more sugar (like corn syrup) than their fattier brethren. Not a good exchange for your six-pack. That said, creamy dressings can add unwanted calories and fat to your green giants.

Smart Play: Forgo the creamy and wimpy slimmed-down versions and select healthier oil-and-vinegar mixtures. Better yet, make your own: Combine olive oil, balsamic vinegar and hot Dijon mustard for a well-dressed salad.

May We Suggest: Newman's Own Balsamic Vinaigrette Dressing (newmansown.com), 2 Tbsp.: 90 calories, 0 g protein, 3 g carbs, 9 g fat (1 g saturated)



DELI MEAT

Physique-Builders: Deck out a sandwich with the right lean deli meat and you'll help your body stockpile heaps of protein, B vitamins, iron and zinc. "Iron is needed for the synthesis of muscle protein, whereas zinc helps regenerate their cells," Gidus points out. Zinc has also been found to help raise levels of testosterone and IGF-1 and helps elevate the metabolic rate.

Physique-Killers: Many packaged cured meats contain nitrite preservatives. Nitrites cause oxidative stress in the body, which is why processed meats have been linked to prostate cancer. On top of that, add too much saturated fat and sodium and your sandwich isn't so body-friendly.

Smart Play: Concentrate on meat slices with a high protein-to-fat ratio such as sliced chicken breast, turkey breast and roast beef. Gidus suggests looking for brands that do away with nitrites and a portion of the salt.

May We Suggest: Applegate Farms Herb Turkey (applegatefarms.com), 4 oz.: 100 calories, 24 g protein, 0 g carbs, 0 g fat (0 g saturated)

M&F

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TUNA

Physique-Builders: Eat enough tuna and you won't have to fish for compliments when it comes to those big guns. It's jam-packed not only with protein but the superhero omega-3 fatty acids that can help your body burn fat like a well-oiled machine.

Physique-Killers: Wolf down a can drowned in oil and you'll reel in 150 extra lackluster calories. Not to be overlooked, your albacore (solid white) tuna might be swimming in mercury, a potent neurotoxin. Yikes.

Smart Play: Save calories by building a sandwich with tuna packed in water. Choose chunk-light tuna for lower mercury levels, or select the albacore version from smaller companies that test for mercury.

May We Suggest: Wild Planet Wild Albacore Tuna (wildplanet.com), 4 oz.: 240 calories, 32 g protein, 0 g carbs, 12 g fat (1 g saturated)

