I want more curves

Alice,

I'm an 18-year-old girl and a size 8. I'm happy with my weight, but I really want more curves. My ideal would be to be about a size 12, but really toned. Is it possible? I'm only 5'4" and don't want to seem out of proportion. Do you think it's possible to gain a few curves by going up a dress size? And how can I gain weight without pigging out on fatty foods? Is there a healthier way to do it?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Curves may be attained in different ways, some of which are more beneficial to health than others. Many Americans have become quite round by eating too many calories and not exercising regularly. Excess weight increases the risk of diseases, including heart disease, diabetes, pregnancy complications, and depression. This roundness may not be the kind of curves you are talking about, however!

Perhaps you are talking about having a more womanly figure; maybe more ample breasts, hips, and/or a plumper posterior. One way to gain curves is by working specific muscle groups in the areas you would like to "shape." Eating a well-balanced diet can help, too. With that being said, it's good to be realistic about the way your body is currently shaped, the shapes that are predominant in your family, and the way you want to look.

If you wear baggy clothing, it may deemphasize whatever curves you already have. If you watch any of the TV makeover shows, you've probably seen that larger, oversized clothes for women in the "before" photos usually hide their waist and make them look boxy. Fitted clothing in certain fabrics, jackets or tops that end at certain parts of the body, and pants or skirts of particular styles may make you appear curvier without requiring that you put on extra pounds. Some women make an appointment with a personal shopper at their nearby department stores to help them select clothes that will emphasize their curves.

Before taking steps to add curves by gaining weight, evaluate your current weight status. One way to do this is by using your height and weight to determine your Body Mass Index (BMI). A BMI value of less than 18.5 is categorized as underweight, 18.5 to 24.9 is ideal, and a BMI of 25 or more is overweight. At 5'4", your ideal weight would range from 108 to 145 pounds. Moving up a dress size would amount to approximately 12 to 15 pounds in weight gain, or 2 BMI points. Going from a size eight to a size twelve would be even more drastic and require
that you add 2.5 inches to your bust, waist, and hips. This gain would be beneficial for someone who is underweight, but would increase the health risks if one’s BMI is approaching the overweight category.

- **Time to get toned.** Whether your weight evaluation has reinforced satisfaction with your weight or motivated you to make changes, increasing physical activity will help you towards your goal of gaining curves. By working specific muscle groups, you'll build up areas that need a boost, which is preferable to gaining fat spread throughout the body. For instance, strengthen your glutes (butt muscles) by doing squats. With your knees directly below your hips, keep your core muscles tight and your back straight as you bend your knees to a ninety degree angle with your thighs parallel to the floor. As you lower and raise your body, keep your weight on your heels and make sure your knees never extend past your toes. Do three to five sets of ten to twelve controlled squats ever other day. To bulk up your bust, do pushups to work the pectoral muscles beneath the breast tissue. Lying on your stomach, place your hands flat on the floor directly under your shoulders (about one foot apart). Keeping your back straight and your core tight, push yourself up supporting yourself with your knees or toes. Lower and raise your body for three to five sets of ten to twelve pushups and repeat every other day.

- **Complement workout efforts with healthy eating.** Whether you are working to maintain a weight you are happy with, or trying to lose/gain weight, a nutritionally balanced eating plan is important and achievable. If you truly need to gain weight, as indicated by a BMI lower than 18.5, increase calorie intake. The extra calories need to come from foods that provide lots of vitamins, minerals, and fiber—not highly processed junk foods. Have an extra snack, perhaps an apple with a tablespoon of peanut butter, in the afternoon. Increase intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and heart healthy fats (like those found in nuts) while checking out other nutrition and portion size suggestions in the related Q&As.

If you are someone with a BMI that is approaching the overweight category, your health would benefit from weight maintenance and even a small amount of weight loss. Cut down calories by trading in junk or processed food for whole foods and smaller portion sizes. An added benefit of weight loss around your middle is that the curves above and below that point will be accentuated. To get more tips and ideas on how to modify your diet and exercise regimen, speak with a registered dietitian or exercise specialist.

More than anything though, it's worth it to try to love your body in its natural form. Remind yourself about the features you do like about your body and accentuate those. You may find that changing your dress size isn't what makes the biggest difference.

Alice!
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Columbia Health Nutrition Services (Morningside)
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