Lean Bulk Plan — Muscle Gain

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Starting point

You are lean enough to run a slow, clean bulk now: aim for +0.5 to 0.8 kg per month for the next 6 months while getting stronger on every main lift.

What the photos show: a solid base after 4 years, with reasonably built shoulders and arms and a lean waist. The biggest visual gains will come from a fuller upper chest, wider lats (the V-shape from behind), and more side-delt and arm size.

Assumptions behind the numbers: 33 years old, 179 cm, 81 kg (your current weight), moderately active, training 5 days a week. All numbers below are calculated for 81 kg; recheck them if your weight moves by 3 kg or more.

Training principles

At 4 years in, growth comes from progressive overload and enough hard sets close to failure, not from new exercises every week.

- **Volume:** 12 to 20 hard sets per muscle per week. Chest, back, side delts and arms sit at the top of that range in this plan.
- **Effort:** finish most sets with 1 to 2 reps in reserve (RIR). Take the last set of isolation moves to failure.
- **Progression (double progression):** each exercise has a rep range, e.g. 6 to 10. When you hit the top of the range on every set, add 2.5 kg (or 1 to 2 kg on small lifts) and work back up.
- **Rest:** 2 to 3 min on compound lifts, 60 to 90 s on isolation work.
- **Tempo:** control the lowering phase for about 2 to 3 seconds; pause briefly in the stretched position.
- **Deload:** every 6 to 8 weeks, do one week with half the sets at the same weights.
- **Warm-up:** 5 min of easy cardio, then 2 to 3 ramp-up sets on the first lift of the day.
- **Cardio:** keep 2 to 3 sessions of 20 to 30 min easy walking or cycling per week for heart health and recovery.

Weekly split (5 days)

Train Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday; rest Wednesday and Sunday. Each session takes about 60 to 75 minutes. Tap any exercise name to open form demo videos.

Day 1 — Upper (strength)

Exercise	Sets × reps	Notes
Incline barbell bench press (30°)	4 × 5–8	Main upper-chest builder
Weighted pull-ups	4 × 5–8	Wide-ish grip, full stretch at the bottom
Seated dumbbell shoulder press	3 × 6–10	
Chest-supported row (machine or T-bar)	3 × 8–10	Pull elbows toward hips
EZ-bar curl	3 × 8–12	
Overhead cable triceps extension	3 × 10–12	Long head, big stretch

Day 2 — Lower (strength)

Exercise	Sets × reps	Notes
Back squat	4 × 5–8	
Romanian deadlift	3 × 6–10	Hinge until hamstrings stretch
Leg press	3 × 10–12	Feet mid-platform
Seated leg curl	3 × 10–12	
Standing calf raise	4 × 8–12	2 s pause at the bottom
Cable crunch	3 × 12–15	

Day 3 — Push (hypertrophy)

Exercise	Sets × reps	Notes
Flat dumbbell press	3 × 8–12	

Exercise	Sets × reps	Notes
Incline machine or Smith press	3 × 8–12	Second upper-chest hit of the week
Cable or pec-deck fly	3 × 12–15	
Cable lateral raise	4 × 12–20	One arm at a time; key for wider shoulders
Dips (weighted if possible)	3 × 8–12	Slight forward lean
Triceps rope pushdown	3 × 12–15	

Day 4 — Pull (hypertrophy)

Exercise	Sets × reps	Notes
Lat pulldown	4 × 8–12	Lat width
Barbell or Pendlay row	3 × 6–10	Back thickness
Single-arm cable row	3 × 10–12	Full stretch forward
Straight-arm cable pulldown	3 × 12–15	
Reverse pec-deck	3 × 15–20	Rear delts
Incline dumbbell curl	3 × 10–12	
Hammer curl	2 × 10–12	Forearms and brachialis

Day 5 — Legs + arms

Exercise	Sets × reps	Notes
Hack squat or Bulgarian split squat	3 × 8–12	
Hip thrust	3 × 8–12	
Leg extension	3 × 12–15	
Lying leg curl	3 × 10–12	
Seated calf raise	3 × 12–15	
Cable lateral raise	3 × 15–20	Third shoulder hit of the week
Superset: cable curl + skull crusher	3 × 10–12	

If a week gets busy, merge Day 3 and Day 4 into one upper session and train 4 days.

Nutrition targets

Eat about 3,050 kcal a day, a surplus of roughly 300 kcal over your estimated maintenance of 2,750 kcal.

Target	Rule	At 81 kg
Calories	Maintenance + 250 to 350 kcal	~3,050 kcal
Protein	2.0 g per kg	~160 g
Fat	0.8 to 1.0 g per kg	~75 g
Carbs	The rest of the calories	~435 g
Fibre	30 to 40 g	
Water	35 to 40 ml per kg	~3 L

- Split protein across 4 meals of 30 to 45 g each.
- Put most carbs in the meals before and after training.
- Keep the same calories on rest days; consistency matters more than daily cycling.
- About 80% whole foods; the other 20% is room for pizza, gelato or an aperitivo without guilt.

Sample day of eating

This day lands at about 3,050 kcal, 185 g protein, 410 g carbs and 73 g fat; weights are raw or dry.

Meal	Food	kcal	Protein (g)
Colazione (7:30)	80 g oats, 250 g Greek yogurt 0%, 1 banana, 25 g honey, 20 g walnuts	760	39
Pranzo (13:00)	130 g pasta, 150 g chicken breast, tomato sauce + vegetables, 10 g olive oil, 10 g Parmigiano	810	55
Pre-workout (17:00)	Panino: 100 g bread + 70 g bresaola; 1 apple	450	32
Cena (20:30)	120 g basmati rice, 150 g salmon, grilled vegetables, 10 g olive oil	850	40
Before bed	150 g skyr, 1 kiwi, 15 g honey	185	17

Meal	Food	kcal	Protein (g)
Total		**~3,055**	**~184**

Easy swaps that keep the numbers similar:

- **Protein:** chicken ↔ turkey, lean beef (manzo magro), tuna, cod (merluzzo), eggs, or 250 g lentils / chickpeas + 30 g whey.
- **Carbs:** pasta ↔ rice, gnocchi, potatoes (about 3× the weight of dry pasta), farro, or bread.
- **Snacks:** bresaola ↔ prosciutto crudo (fat trimmed), ricotta, or a whey shake with milk.
- **Fats:** walnuts ↔ almonds, extra virgin olive oil, avocado or dark chocolate.

Shopping, supplements and sleep

Buy staples in bulk weekly; only creatine is worth adding as a supplement, with whey as a convenience.

Shopping in Turin

- **Porta Palazzo market:** cheapest fruit, vegetables, legumes and chicken in the city; go in the morning.
- **Esselunga, Coop, Carrefour:** Greek yogurt, skyr, bresaola, frozen salmon and cod, and protein-labelled products.
- **Lidl and Eurospin:** good prices on oats, rice, tuna, eggs, milk and nuts.

Supplements

- **Creatine monohydrate:** 3 to 5 g daily, any time, every day including rest days. The best-supported supplement for muscle gain.
- **Whey protein:** only if you struggle to reach your protein target with food.
- **Vitamin D:** worth checking your blood level with your doctor before winter.

Sleep and recovery

- 7.5 to 9 hours a night; growth happens during recovery, not in the gym.
- 8,000 to 10,000 steps a day keeps appetite and conditioning in check.

Tracking and adjusting

Judge progress by your weekly average weight and your lifts, then adjust calories every 2 to 3 weeks.

What you see after 2–3 weeks	What to change
Weekly average up less than 0.1 kg/week	Add 150 to 200 kcal (e.g. +50 g pasta or rice)
Up 0.1 to 0.2 kg/week, lifts rising	Keep going, change nothing
Up more than 0.3 kg/week, waist growing fast	Remove 150 to 200 kcal
Lifts stalled 3+ weeks	Check sleep and calories first, then take a deload week

- [ ] Weigh in every morning after the bathroom; compare weekly averages only.
- [ ] Measure waist at the navel every 2 weeks.
- [ ] Log every workout (weights and reps) in a notes app or Strong / Hevy.
- [ ] Take photos in the same hallway mirror and light every 4 weeks.
- [ ] Track food in an app such as Yazio or MyFitnessPal for the first 2 to 3 weeks to learn portions.