

Physical Concerns – *Weight Gain*

Internet version of this handout with active resource links at: <http://cancer-help.me/weightgain>

Slight increases in weight during cancer treatment are generally not a problem. But significant weight gain can affect a person's health. Reports show that weight gain during treatment is linked to a poorer chance of recovery. Being overweight before treatment begins also increases the risk of serious health conditions. These include high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart problems. Significant amounts of weight gain after treatment can also increase risk of recurrence in some types of cancer.

Relieving side effects is an important part of cancer care and treatment. This is called symptom management or palliative care. Talk with your health care team about any symptoms you experience and any change in symptoms.

Causes of weight gain during cancer treatment

Chemotherapy can lead to weight gain in several ways by:

- Causing the body to hold on to excess fluid, called edema.
- Causing people to reduce physical activity, usually because of fatigue.
- Causing nausea that is improved by eating.
- Triggering intense food cravings.
- Decreasing a person's metabolism, which is the rate that the body uses energy.
- Causing menopause in some women, which decreases the metabolism.

Steroid medications may be prescribe during cancer treatment for several reasons, including to reduce symptoms of inflammation, such as swelling and pain and to treat nausea. Steroids can also cause certain side effects. Short and long term steroid use can lead to increased appetite causing excess caloric intake. Long term steroid use can lead to weight gain and/or increased fatty tissue which can increase the size of a person's abdomen and cause fullness in the neck or face. Additionally long term steroid use can lead to loss of weight and muscle mass also called wasting.

Hormonal therapy may be used to treat breast, uterine, prostate, and testicular cancers. It involves medicines that decrease the amount of estrogen or progesterone in women and testosterone in men. Decreases in these hormone levels can increase fat, decrease muscle, and lower the metabolism.

Adapted from: <https://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/side-effects/weight-gain>

Managing weight gain

If weight gain becomes a concern, talk with your doctor or a registered dietitian (RD) before starting a diet or changing your eating habits. Consider the following ways to address weight gain through diet and physical activity:

- Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Limit fat, added sugar, and refined flour.
- Eliminate sugar sweetened beverages including soda, fruit juice, sports drinks and sweet teas.
- Drink plenty of water. A good goal is 8 cups per day.
- Use healthier cooking methods whenever possible. For example, try steaming instead of frying.
- Identify everyday eating patterns that lead to overeating and inactivity. Your RD can help you with this.
- Find physical activities, such as walking or bicycling, that you enjoy. Check with your doctor before starting any new type.

Managing fluid retention-related weight gain

Call your doctor if you experience any of the following signs of fluid retention:

- Skin that feels stiff or leaves small indentations after pressing on the swollen area.
 - Swelling of arms or legs, especially around ankles and wrists.
 - Rings, wristwatches, bracelets, or shoes that fit tighter than usual.
 - Decreased flexibility in hands, elbows, wrists, fingers, or legs.
- The following tips can help you manage fluid retention:
- Ask a doctor about prescribing a medication that increases urination to rid the body of excess water. This is called a diuretic.
 - Lower the amount of salt in your diet. A registered dietician can help with this if available.
 - Avoid standing for long periods and elevate your feet as often as possible. Avoid crossing your legs, which restricts blood flow.
 - Weigh yourself at the same time each day and write down the number. Bring this log to appointments for your care team to evaluate.
 - Avoid tight clothing and footwear.
 - Ask your health care team if wearing support or compression stockings may help.

Resources for Additional Information:

- [NCCN, Information on Diet and Weight Changes](#)
- [Memorial Sloan Kettering Eating Well During and After Your Cancer Treatment](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Information on Weight Gain](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Weight Gain](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Obesity, Weight, and Cancer Risk](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Obesity, Weight, and Cancer Risk](#)
- [NIH, Nutrition in Cancer Care \(PDQ®\)](#)

- [Memorial Sloan Kettering Eating Well](#)
- [Chemocare, Weight Changes](#)
- [American Institute for Cancer Research, Weight and Cancer Risk](#)

Información Española

- [American Cancer Society, Aumento de peso](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Aumento de peso](#)
- [Chemocare, Cambios de peso](#)