

Medication and your weight

Medicines can sometimes change the way your body controls how much you eat. In some people this may lead to weight gain.

Examples of some medicines which may lead to weight gain include:

- > antipsychotics (eg olanzapine, quetiapine, risperidone and clozapine);
- > corticosteroids (eg prednisolone);
- > oral contraceptive pills;
- > medicines used to treat diabetes (eg insulin)
- > mood stabilizers (eg lithium);
- > tricyclic antidepressants (eg amitriptyline) and some newer antidepressants (eg mirtazapine)
- > some medicines used to treat epilepsy (eg sodium valproate and carbamazepine).

Please note that this is not a complete list. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you are unsure about the medication you are taking.

Why does this happen?

We gain weight when we take in more energy from food than is used up. Medications may influence weight gain by

- > increasing your appetite and causing you to eat more;
- > making you feel less energetic, and so exercise less;
- > increasing energy storage into fat cells;
- > causing a dry mouth, so you drink lots of sugary drinks and juice.

Tips to prevent weight gain

Think about your appetite

If you are gaining too much weight, then think about:

- > what you eat and drink;
- > when you eat;
- > how much you eat; and
- > how you feel before you eat and how you feel afterwards.

Keeping a simple 'food diary' for a few days can be very helpful. Just write down everything you eat, including all of your snacks and drinks during the day. Then have a look at your eating patterns to identify factors that may contribute to weight gain. For example:

- > Do you have regular meals or do you have lots of snacks during the day?
- > Do you really feel hungry before you eat?
- > Do your food choices contain a lot of sugar or fat?
- > Do your drink choices contain a lot of sugar?

Keep an eye on your weight

Weigh yourself or get a healthcare professional to weigh you regularly at each check up. Talk to your healthcare professional about any weight gain (or loss) patterns.

Try to eat regular meals

You will have more control over your diet if you have three meals at regular times each day, with one or two small snacks if you need them.

Choose healthy foods

Make sure you eat a variety of foods each day. A healthy diet includes plenty of vegetables, fruit, wholegrain breads and cereals, lean meat and low fat dairy products.

Avoid processed foods

Many processed foods are high in fat and sugar, and should be avoided.

Be active

Aim to do something active most days. Thirty to 60 minutes a day spent in moderate exercise such as walking and playing outside can have great benefits for your health.

Limit screen time

Limit the amount of time you spend watching the TV or playing computer games.

Increased appetite and how to deal with it

Once you know how much and what you are eating / drinking and have thought about your appetite, there are some things you can do to help keep your appetite under control.

- > Eat a variety of healthy foods each day.
- > Try to keep busy. Eating is sometimes just a distraction – 'something to do'. Try doing something active or interesting instead.
- > Have a glass of water or other sugar-free drink before and during meals. It will help fill you up, without adding calories.
- > Choose sugar-free alternatives. Sugar substitutes taste just like sugar, and it is easy to buy 'diet' brands of cola and other soft drinks.
- > Choose unsweetened types of food and drinks – for example, orange juice with 'no added sugar', and unsweetened canned fruit.
- > Eat small portions at meals.
- > Eat breakfast every morning.

Increased appetite and how to deal with it (continued)

- > Make a plan about what you will eat and when. Give yourself a reward (not food!) when you stick to it.

Think about drinks

- > Drinks can provide lots of unneeded calories.
- > Do you drink excessive amounts of milk, fruit juice, juice based drinks (eg. fruit boxes), cordials or soft drink instead of water?

Decrease fat intake

Fat is high in energy and can easily lead to weight gain. Some simple eating tips to decrease fat in diet can help:

- > Limit 'take away' foods to once a fortnight and avoid foods that are crumbed, battered or fried.
- > Use healthy cooking methods, such as roasting, grilling and baking instead of frying.
- > Always trim visible fat off meat.
- > Limit added fats, decrease use of butter, margarine and cream.
- > Choose reduced fat dairy products.

It is best to prevent excess weight gain rather than try to fix it once it has happened

Being overweight is bad for your health. It can

- > increase the chance of problems such as heart disease and diabetes;
- > be distressing and depressing;

- > make you feel uncomfortable by making you short of breath, making your knees and back ache, and making it difficult to move around.

Where to go for more help

Get support from family and friends. Support is very important for long-term success in adopting healthy habits.

If you are concerned about your weight discuss this with your GP or specialist.

Ask your doctor for a referral to a dietitian or find a private dietitian.

Further information is available at www.daa.asn.au

For more information

Pharmacy Drug Information

Women's and Children's Hospital

72 King William Road

North Adelaide 5006

Telephone: (08) 8161 7222

Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm

www.wch.sa.gov.au

Nutrition Department

Telephone: (08) 8161 7233

Non-English speaking: for information in languages other than English, call the interpreting and Translating Centre and ask them to call Department of Health. This service is available at no cost to you, contact (08) 8226 1990.

Disclaimer

By using this information, you acknowledge that the Department of Health, the Minister for Health, or any employees of the Department of Health do not accept liability however arising, for any consequences of anything done or not done by a person in relation to the usage of and/or reliance (whether in whole or in part) the information provided herein.

© Department of Health, Government of South Australia.
All rights reserved. Reviewed November 2011 Printed November 2011.

Women's & Children's Hospital

Preventing Weight Gain Associated With Medication Use

Information for patients