

Fact sheet

Preventing Weight Gain associated with Medication Use

Medicines and your weight

Medicines can sometimes change the way your body controls how much you eat. Some people may then put on weight.

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

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

This is not a complete list. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist if you are unsure about the medicine you are taking.

Why does weight gain happen?

We put on weight when we take in more energy from food than is used up.

Medicines may affect this by:

- > increasing your appetite (how hungry you feel) so you eat more
- > making you feel that you have less energy so you exercise less
- > storing more energy in fat cells
- > causing a dry mouth, so you drink lots of sugary drinks and juice.

Tips to prevent weight gain

Try to eat 3 main meals each day

You will have more control over your diet if you have three meals at regular times. Have 1 or 2 small snacks if you need them. Don't skip breakfast as this can lead to overeating at the next meal or snack.

Choose healthy foods

Choose a variety from each food group:

- > Aim for 2 serves of fruit and 5 serves of vegetables each day.
- > Choose high fibre and lower glycaemic index (low GI) carbohydrates such as wholegrain breads and cereals, pasta and rice.
- > Choose smaller amounts of low fat dairy foods, lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs and nuts.

Decrease fat intake

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

- > Only have takeaway foods once every 2 weeks and avoid foods that are crumbed, battered or fried – choose grilled options.
- > Use healthy cooking methods such as roasting, grilling and baking instead of frying.
- > Always trim off meat fat you can see.
- > Limit added fat, decrease the amount of butter, margarine and cream you use.
- > Choose reduced fat dairy products.

Think about drinks

- > Choose water as your main drink because other drinks can have lots of calories (energy) you do not need.
- > Drinking excessive amounts of milk, fruit juice, juice based drinks (e.g. fruit boxes), cordials or soft drink can lead to weight gain.

Avoid processed foods

Many processed foods are high in fat and sugar and you should avoid them.

Be active

Aim to do something active most days. Moderate exercise such as walking and playing outside for 30 to 60 minutes a day can have great benefits for your health.



Think about your appetite

If you are gaining too much weight think about:

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

Keeping a simple 'food diary' for a few days can help you. Write down everything you eat during the day including all of your snacks and drinks. Then have a look at your eating patterns to find factors that may be causing weight gain. For example:

- > Do you eat regular meals or do you have lots of snacks during the day?
- > Do you really feel hungry before you eat?
- > Do your food and drinks have a lot of sugar or fat in them?

Keep an eye on your weight

Weigh yourself or get a healthcare professional (e.g. doctor or nurse) to weigh you at each check-up. Talk with them about any weight gain (or loss) patterns.

Limit screen time

Limit the amount of time you spend watching the television, playing computer games or on an ipad or phone to no more than 2 hours per day.

How to deal with increased appetite

Keep your appetite under control by:

- > Eating a variety of healthy foods each day.
- > Keeping busy. Eating is sometimes just a distraction – 'something to do'. Try doing something active or interesting instead.

- > Having a glass of water or other sugar-free drinks before and during meals. It will help fill you up, without adding energy.
- > Choose sugar-free food and drink. Sugar substitutes taste just like sugar and it is easy to buy 'diet' brands of cola and other soft drinks and cordials.
- > Choose unsweetened food and drinks – for example, orange juice with 'no added sugar', and unsweetened canned fruit.
- > Eat smaller portions at meals and eat breakfast every morning.
- > Make a plan about what you will eat and when. Give yourself a reward (not food!) when you stick to it.

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 health problems such as heart disease and diabetes
- > be distressing and depressing
- > cause you to feel uncomfortable by making you short of breath, making your knees and back ache and making it hard to move.

Where to go for more help

It is important to get support from family and friends. It will help you achieve long-term success in having healthy habits. If you are worried about your weight discuss it with your GP or specialist. Ask them for a referral to a dietitian or seek support from a private dietitian.

Further information is available at:

<https://dietitiansaustralia.org.au/>

WCH Nutrition Department

Telephone: (08) 8161 7233

For more information

SA Pharmacy Medicines Information Service
Women's and Children's Hospital
Phone: (08) 8161 7555 (9am – 5pm Weekdays)
Email: medinfo@sa.gov.au

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 for Health and Ageing, Government of South Australia. All rights reserved.
Updated July 2020



www.ausgoal.gov.au/creative-commons



SA Health