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Side Effects from Medications: Dealing with Increased Appetite and Weight

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Summary: For many medical conditions, medications can be helpful and life saving. Unfortunately, medications can also carry side effects such as increased appetite and weight gain. The good news is that many things can be done for this.

What To Do About Weight Gain?

Let your doctor know so that you can talk about various strategies such as the following:
Changes to your diet.

- Consider talking with a registered dietician (RD) about changes that you can do to your diet in order to help with your weight. There may be one that works at your doctor's clinic or hospital. Otherwise, there are registered dieticians that you can pay privately to see for a consultation session.
- In general, people need to reduce 500–1,000 kcal/daily from their current diet, as well as make sure that less than 30% of calories come from dietary fat.

Consider intermittent fasting

- Intermittent fasting is a method used since antiquity, and which has been receiving more attention recently (Patterson, 2015). It involves eating meals within a window of time in a day (such as 8 hrs each 24 hr day), and during the other period (such as 16 hrs each 24-hr day) , you don't eat, which burns energy and keeps your body from storing energy as fat. A typical "16/8 intermittent fasting" schedule might be:
    - Eating meals only between 8 AM to 4 PM.
    - Eating meals only between 10 AM to 6 PM, or
    - Eating meals only between 12 - 8 PM, or

Increase your physical activity.

- If you are eating more, then consider increasing your physical activity.
- Start small. Find an activity you like, and do it. The easiest is going for a walk, or a bike ride.
- The typical goal is at least 150 minutes of moderate (55%–69% of the maximum heart rate) exercise weekly, which is only about 20-minutes a day... All you need is a quick 10-min walk twice a day!
- For more information https://www.ementalhealth.ca/index.php?m=article&ID=69834

Dealing with food cravings

- Are you getting a craving to eat, but its not a meal time? Try these strategies
    - Keep well hydrated, like water with ice; water with lemon/ lime juice; tea or herbal-tea.

    - Chewing gum.
    - Snacking on low calorie vegetables like carrots, cucumbers, celery, broccoli; these fill you up with fiber and provide water for hydration.

Home environment.

- Mindful eating. Eat purposely when it is a mealtime by eating at the kitchen or dining room table.
- Don’t eat mindlessly. Don’t eat at other times such as watching TV, standing at the fridge, reading in bed, working on the computer, etc.
- Eliminate sources of temptation. Don’t buy junk foods or snack foods for the home such as bags of chips, cookies, ice cream, etc. If you absolutely want to have a treat, go out and get bag of chips at the corner store, or go out for ice cream at the ice cream place.
- Have healthy snacks cut up and ready to eat such as
    - Vegetables, e.g. carrots, cucumbers, celery, broccoli.
    - Fruit, e.g. apples, oranges, bananas.
    - Nuts, e.g. roasted, low salt almonds, peanuts, etc.
    - Dairy, e.g. low sugar yogurt.
    - Everything in moderation -- if you eat too much healthy snacks (e.g. several apples), that’s not good either. A healthy snack is ideally 100 calories or so.

Mealtimes

- Before eating, drink a large glass of water before eating which helps fill up your stomach.
- At mealtimes, don’t put serving dishes at the dinner table, as it is too easy to keep refilling your plate with food. Instead, prepare your plate of food from serving dishes on the kitchen counter or stove.
- Portion sizing. On your plate, fill half with vegetables, a quarter with protein, and a quarter with carbs.
- Plate size. Use smaller plates, bowls and glasses.
- Is someone else offering you seconds? Say, “No thanks, I’m not hungry, thank you!”
- After mealtimes, is there leftover food?
    - Store it immediately and put it away.
    - Or compost it -- tell yourself that it is not going to waste. It is being reused. After all, you’ve just eaten and have had enough -- it is healthier to feed other living creatures with that food!
- Eat until you are almost full.
- Many North Americans eat until we are full. Instead, we should simply eat until we are no longer hungry. In Okinawa, Japan, people have one of the lowest rates of illness and one of the world’s highest life expectancies. One of the reasons is believed to be their philosophy of “hara hachi bu”, which means “eat until you are 80% full.”
- Eat slowly over at least 20-minutes.
    - Your stomach needs 20-min. to sense that it is full. If you eat quickly in less than 20-minutes, you could end up eating too much, without your stomach realizing it is actually full.

Shopping

- Before going shopping, write a list of what you need.
- While shopping, buy what is on your list. Try to avoid things not on the list, unless you really do absolutely need them.
- Don’t shop when you are hungry. It makes us buy junk food!

I’ve Tried All that, and Weight Gain is Still a Problem!

Have you tried various strategies but nothing seems to work? In that case, please let your doctor know.
Other options include:

- Trying a different medication. Hopefully there may be other options that have less tendency to increase your appetite and/or cause weight gain.
- Every person is unique. Some people can take a medication and not have any problems with weight gain;

whereas other people will have problems.
- Know that changing medications does carry a potential risk that the other medication might be less able to treat your condition, and that the symptoms of your condition might worsen.

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About this Document

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