



Center for Integrative Oncology and Survivorship

Weight Gain Facts

Weight gain can be caused by a variety of factors, including age, lifestyle, diet and changes in hormones. If you are wondering why you've gained weight, read through the following sections to see if one or more applies to your situation.

Aging

As you age, your body composition changes. Lean muscle mass decreases starting as early as age 30 and declines more rapidly after 50. It is replaced by fat, which is not as metabolically active. The result is a slower metabolism, and unless you adjust your caloric intake, the excess will be stored as more fat.

Older adults are also less likely to exercise, and this sedentary lifestyle is another factor in weight gain. It is estimated that 60% percent of adults do not get enough exercise, and that percentage increases with age.

Lifestyle

During stressful life events, such as a battle with cancer, nutrition and exercise may take a back seat. A decrease in exercise paired with increased calorie consumption is a certain combination for weight gain. Just an extra 250 calories consumed per day (or 250 fewer calories burned per day) will result in a 2-pound weight gain per month and, before you know it, 24 pounds in a year.

Hormone Fluctuations

A decrease in estrogen from hormone therapy or menopause can cause a reduction in lean body mass. When your lean body mass decreases, you burn fewer calories on a daily basis.

Changes in estrogen levels also may have an impact on your body's energy level and ability to regulate appetite. This may be in part because of the body's decreased efficiency at metabolizing carbohydrates after menopause.

Weight gain while on androgen deprivation therapy is not fully understood, but may be related to a reduction in lean body mass because of reduced testosterone.

How to Combat Unwanted Weight Gain

While these and other factors may make managing your weight more difficult, it is not an impossible task. Begin with small, simple changes and gradually create a sustainable, healthy lifestyle. Try the tips below to work toward a healthier weight:

- Limit refined carbohydrates such as white breads, pastas, snack foods and sugary beverages
- Increase intake of fruits and vegetables to 5 cups daily
- Aim for 150 minutes of cardio exercise weekly and at least 2 days of strength training to build lean muscle mass
- Become a mindful eater and be aware of calories consumed compared to calories burned
- Schedule a visit with the CIOS registered dietitian for an individualized nutrition plan by calling **(864) 455-1346**, or read the material available on our CIOS website at ghs.org/cancer/cios.