

Gaining Weight?

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 increases the risk of serious health conditions. These include high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart problems.

Significant amounts of weight gain after treatment can increase risk of recurrence in some cancer types.

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 fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Limit fat, added sugars, and refined flours.
- Eliminate sugar sweetened beverages like soda, fruit juice, sports drinks & sweet teas.
- Drink water. A good goal is 8 cups per day.
- Use healthy 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.

Content adapted from websites below.

Causes of weight gain during cancer treatment

Chemotherapy can lead to weight gain 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, the rate the body uses energy.
- Causing menopause in some women, which decreases metabolism.

Steroid medications may be prescribed during cancer treatment to reduce symptoms of inflammation and related pain and to treat nausea. Steroids can also cause certain side effects. Short- and long-term steroid use can increase appetite. 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 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 hormones can increase fat, decrease muscle, and lower metabolism.

Managing fluid retention-related weight gain

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

- Skin that feels stiff or leaves indents 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:

- [American Institute for Cancer Research, Weight and Cancer Risk](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Weight Changes](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Weight Gain](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Weight, and Cancer Risk](#)
- [Memorial Sloan Kettering Eating Well During Your Cancer Treatment](#)
- [NIH, Nutrition in Cancer Care \(PDO®\)](#)
- [Chemocare, Weight Changes](#)

Recursos en Español:

- [American Cancer Society, Cambios en el peso](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Aumento de peso](#)
- [Chemocare, Cambios de peso](#)
- [NIH, La nutrición en el tratamiento del cáncer \(PDO®\) – Versión para pacientes](#)