



# Managing Weight Gain after Cancer Treatment

UHN

## Information for cancer survivors

Some people gain weight during cancer treatment.

Gaining too much weight (above the recommended body mass index for your weight and height) may affect your health and recovery after cancer.

Read this pamphlet to learn about:

- What causes weight gain
- What you can do to deal with weight gain
- Where to get more information

## What causes weight gain?

| Cancer treatment can cause you to gain weight. |  |
|--|--|
| Cause of weight gain                           | What to expect   |
| <b>Chemotherapy</b>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chemotherapy can cause the body to hold on to fluid</li><li>• Some chemotherapy drugs may decrease how fast your body uses energy.</li><li>• In women, can cause menopause, which decreases how fast your body uses energy and can cause weight gain</li></ul> <p>You may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• eat more to help with nausea</li><li>• eat more as a way to deal with stress and anxiety</li></ul> <p>crave sweets or fatty foods</p> |
| <b>Chemotherapy and radiation</b>              | Chemotherapy and radiation can lead to being less active due to fatigue.   |

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| <p><b>Steroid medications</b></p> | <p>Steroids can be used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• treat cancer</li> <li>• reduce swelling and pain</li> </ul> <p>Having a bigger appetite is a common side effect of steroids.</p> <p>This can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead to an increase in fatty tissue, resulting in a large abdomen and fullness in the neck or face.</li> <li>• Steroids may also cause wasting (loss of both weight and muscle mass). A noticeable increase in weight usually only happens when people take steroids for many weeks in a row.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Hormone therapy</b></p>     | <p>Hormone therapy treats breast, uterine, prostate, and testicular cancers. Medications lower hormones in men and women (estrogen or progesterone in women and testosterone in men).</p> <p>This can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase body mass from fat</li> <li>• decrease body mass from muscle</li> <li>• decrease metabolism</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Surgery</b></p>             | <p>Surgery to the ovaries or uterus may lead to menopause. This can raise you chance of gaining weight.</p>  |

## What can I do to manage my weight gain?

**Relieving side effects is an important part of cancer care and treatment. Talk to your health care team about your symptoms, including any new symptoms or a change in symptoms.**

**Talk with your physician and ask for a referral to a registered dietitian (RD) before starting a diet or changing what you eat.**

They can help you find out what is causing your weight gain and find the best way to manage it. An RD can also give you a diet plan that is right for you.

### **Eat healthy foods and exercise**

- Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Choose lean proteins such as fish, beans and peas, low-fat dairy products (yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese) and lean cuts of chicken or turkey. Nuts and nut butters can also be good protein sources but are high in calories. Keep portion sizes small.
- Limit fat, sugar, and refined flour.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Try to use healthier ways of cooking, such as steaming instead of frying.
- Notice your eating habits and try to find out what leads you to overeat or be less active.
- Walk, cycle and do muscle strengthening exercises such as lifting weights and resistance training.

**ELLICSR Kitchen offers two classes on eating healthy.**

1. From Plant to Plate is run by a chef and dietician who are joined by guests from local farms, restaurants, and other health and food focused organizations. Here you will learn how food is grown, and how to prepare your food.
2. The Survivor's Kitchen: Cooking for Health class is run by a chef and dietician who provide advice and great recipes to keep you eating healthy.

For more information about these classes and recipes visit [ELLICSRkitchen.ca](http://ELLICSRkitchen.ca)

**Check with your doctor before starting a new type of exercise or increasing how much exercise you do now.**

**Manage weight gain from fluid retention**

Contact your doctor right away if you have any of these signs of fluid retention:

- Skin that feels stiff or leaves small marks on your skin after pressing on the swollen area.
- Swelling of the arms or legs, especially around the ankles and wrists.
- Rings, wristwatches, bracelets, or shoes that fit tighter than usual.
- Less flexibility in your hands, elbows, wrists, fingers, or legs.

### **Tips to help you manage fluid retention**

- Ask a doctor about prescribing a diuretic medication (medication that increases urination) to rid the body of excess water.
- Lower the amount of salt in in the foods you eat.
- Don't stand for a long time, and raise your feet as often as possible.
- Don't cross your legs. It can stop blood flow.
- Weigh yourself at the same time each day, and record how much you weigh every day. Tell your health care team about your weight when you have an appointment so they can help.
- Don't wear tight clothing.

## **Where can I get more information?**

### **Canadian Cancer Society**

Topic: Healthy Living

Website: [www.cancer.ca/~media/cancer.ca/CW/publications/Eat%20well%20be%20active/Eat-well-be-active-2011-EN.pdf](http://www.cancer.ca/~media/cancer.ca/CW/publications/Eat%20well%20be%20active/Eat-well-be-active-2011-EN.pdf)

A comprehensive tool to focus on healthy eating, healthy body weight, eating well and being active. Also provides practical ideas for implementing change in the grocery store, at home, at work and when going out.

### **American Cancer Society**

Topic: Weight Changes

Website: [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/physicalsideeffects/dealingwithsymptomsathome/caring-for-the-patient-with-cancer-at-home-weight-changes](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/physicalsideeffects/dealingwithsymptomsathome/caring-for-the-patient-with-cancer-at-home-weight-changes)

## Cancer Net

Topic: Weight gain

Website: [www.cancer.net/all-about-cancer/treating-cancer/managing-side-effects/weight-gain](http://www.cancer.net/all-about-cancer/treating-cancer/managing-side-effects/weight-gain)

### **Remember:**

- ✓ Talk to a professional before making any changes to your diet and exercise habits
- ✓ Eat healthy
- ✓ Look out for fluid retention
- ✓ Increase activity gradually if approved by your doctor



