

Managing Cancer-Related Weight Gain

For many cancer survivors, weight gain is an unwelcome side effect. But incorporating healthy lifestyle habits can help.

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While you may have been advised not to lose weight after a cancer diagnosis, it is more common to gain weight post-diagnosis. This unwanted weight gain is often associated with a decrease in [physical activity](#) and exercise, often due to [fatigue](#). Other physical restrictions from surgery or low blood counts from [chemotherapy](#) may also make you more sedentary. Medications such as steroids alter metabolism, and hormonal treatments, for both men and women, often increase body fat. Finally, emotional stress can lead to a desire for more high-fat and high-sugar foods.

It's important to understand the realities of what happens to the body after cancer, but it's also essential to recognize that your body will respond positively to incorporating certain lifestyle changes. No matter your age, cancer type or treatment status, you can take positive steps. Cultivating healthy habits—in all areas of your life—including stress management, enjoyment, sleep, connection with others and a sound diet and exercise plan will not only help you feel better but may also lead to results on your scale as well. Focus on these five areas:

1. Reduce Daily Sedentary Time

Try to move for one minute every hour you are awake. Not only will this give you more energy, but it will also increase the number of calories you burn every day. Simply by adding an extra 2,000 steps (about one mile) per day, you'll burn an extra 100 calories—equal to losing an extra pound over a month.

2. Incorporate Strength Training

The more muscle you have, the more calories you will burn. Resistance training is beneficial for weight loss because it not only burns calories while you do it but also elevates your metabolism, resulting in more calories burned each day. Muscle also takes up less space, which means your clothes will fit better.

3. Eat Fewer Calories Than You Need

Create a moderate calorie deficit so your body uses up stored fat for fuel. Calculate your estimated calorie burn (use an online calculator). Then aim to reduce daily calories by 300 if you're a woman and by 500 if you're a man. Track your calories using pen and paper or an online food tracker.

4. Focus on Hydration

Being adequately hydrated helps reduce your appetite, supports your body's muscular, digestive and other systems , assists in flushing waste out of the body and helps keep you more energetic. Hydration may also improve metabolism and how your body stores fat.

5. Manage Stress

Stress is also associated with weight gain. When you experience a stressor of any kind, your body has a surge of adrenaline, triggering the release of cortisol. Cortisol makes us hungry and often triggers the desire for quick energy in the form of sweet, salty and fatty foods. These foods also release pleasure chemicals that we associate with stress relief. A regular stress management routine will help reduce these unhealthy habits as well as improve energy, focus, memory and good-quality sleep. Tip: When you feel stress coming on, inhale for five counts, hold your breath for five counts, exhale for five counts and hold for five more counts.