



# Weight Gain & Nutrition

A side effect of some medications, health conditions, or of frequent hospitalizations is often **weight loss**. Weight loss in an individual who is overweight that is intentional and done gradually, can be healthy. However, if weight loss is unintentional and rapid, it can often be problematic, and may hinder rehabilitation or lead to further health problems.

If weight loss has occurred, or is beginning to occur, it is an indication that the body is not getting the number of calories it needs to maintain weight, and is turning to its own energy supply (fat and muscle) for calories. If this happens, it is important to increase the number of calories eaten each day to better meet the body's needs. A dietitian can determine the number of calories needed each day.

If someone is experiencing a decreased appetite, some antidepressant medications can be prescribed by a doctor to help increase appetite. Luckily, medications are not always needed, and instead changes can be made to the diet. Adding more calorie-dense foods to the diet can be one change:

- Meats higher in fat (e.g., beef)
- Fruits and vegetables higher in calories (e.g., avocados) or with added fat
- Nuts or nut butters
- Full fat dairy instead of low fat or non-fat
- Eggs
- Milkshakes or ice cream
- Cheese
- Fatty fish (e.g., salmon, mackerel) over white fish (e.g., cod, tilapia)



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Foods can also be fortified with high fat/high calorie ingredients in order to increase the amount of calories they provide:

- Add butter to potatoes, hot cereal, toast, or vegetables
- Add more oil to salads, vegetables, or use it in cooking
- Spread nut butters on fruit, bread, or crackers
- Put cheese on eggs or cooked vegetables
- Add sugar (brown or regular) to hot and cold cereals
- Add extra gravy to meat
- Add milk powder to food and drinks (e.g., hot cereal, milk, soup, and casseroles)
- Dip bread in olive oil



**What about cholesterol levels?** Some find it difficult to increase their intake of foods like butter, cheese, and milk as these can have higher amounts of saturated fat and are often not considered “heart healthy.” For some individuals, it may be acceptable to increase the amount of these foods eaten in order to avoid unintentional weight loss. If concerned about heart health, choosing unsaturated fat sources such as oils may be a better option. Talk with your doctor about any diet changes you want to make.

Check with a dietitian or doctor for your specific dietary needs.

*Additional Notes:*

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