

Causes of Weight Gain

All impacts on body weight are caused through either 1. Too much (or the wrong type of) food (energy intake), and/or 2. Too little movement (energy expenditure). The following is a list of ways this can happen. Check to see which is/are the biggest danger's) for you.

Energy intake

1. **Too much fat:** This is generally accepted as the main problem in modern societies because fat is energy dense (eg. 9 cal/g compared to 4 for carbohydrate or protein), is addictive, is stored easily in the body and is very easy to get. People with this as a main cause have a 'fat tooth' and over-consume fatty foods.
2. **Too many calories:** If fat is controlled, there can also be a problem with too many calories. Carbohydrate and protein are generally not turned to fat in the human body, but they can be if portion sizes are too big.
3. **Too high energy density:** Energy density refers to the number of calories or kilojoules per gram of food. High energy-dense foods are high in fat and/or sugar. Low energy dense-foods are high in fibre and water. Even if a food is low in fat, it can be high in energy density because of the high level of sugar and low water and fibre.
4. **Excessive hunger:** There are big differences in hunger levels between people. It's also known that hormones encouraging us to feel hungry are more common in obese people who have reduced weight leading to a long-term tendency to over-eat.
5. **Night eating:** Night eating syndrome is a common phenomenon in overweight people leading to an excessive intake of foods. The causes are often psychological and may need special treatment.
6. **Social eating:** It's well known that we all eat more when there are other people present at a meal. Social eating, which is a part of modern living, therefore has to take some of the blame for the excessive food intake in some people.
7. **Habitual eating:** This is 'learned eating', which can be a result of (a) learned ways of acting (such as getting something to eat every time an ad comes on TV), or (b) learned ways of thinking (such as - feel depressed and worthless so I'll have some chocolate for comfort). Habitual eating needs to be unlearned to see weight loss.
8. **Lack of awareness of intake:** This is most common in men who are unaware of the energy density of different foods. Learning about high-energy dense foods can help.
9. **Food intake with alcohol:** Although alcohol on its own is not fattening, several of the effects of alcohol can make it so. Adding fatty, or high energy-dense foods to a meal can mean the alcohol is burned as energy and the other calories stored as fat. Alcohol also turns to lower the inhibition to eat the right foods.
10. **The 'Eye-Mouth' Gap:** This explains how the average person under-estimates what s/he eats by up to 30%. It's not lying. It's the eye not seeing what's going into the mouth - and don't think you don't do it, we all do.
11. **The 'exception' rule:** Everybody thinks the food they ate today is an exception. It's not. Weekends, public holidays birthdays, Friday nights... are all 'exceptions.'

Energy Expenditure

1. **A sedentary job:** Most work today is done by machines and most people have jobs which are either totally or partially sedentary. If you are naturally inactive outside work hours, look no further than your job as a cause of the problem.
2. **Inactive transport to and from work:** In the past, the majority of the population walked or rode bikes to work or school. Those days are gone in the era of the car.

3. **Lack of 'planned' movement:** This means taking time out for some physical activity such as walking. In a technological society, this is often necessary to compensate.
4. **Lack of 'incidental' movement:** 'Incidental' movement is that which is done for you by machines or other people. In an age of remote controls, e-mails, and effort saving devices, this type of movement throughout the day is also a thing of the past.
5. **Lack of awareness:** Because exercise has been promoted as vital for improvements in fitness, most people aren't aware that all that is needed for weight loss is movement. It doesn't have to be vigorous and it doesn't have to be continuous.
6. **The wrong type of movement:** Vigorous (anaerobic) exercise burns blood sugars, not fat. Weight supportive exercises like swimming and cycling do not require as much energy as movement where the body weight is not supported. Hence the wrong type of regular activity can lead to ineffectiveness in weight loss.
7. **Fatigue or laziness:** Fatigue is a 20th century phenomenon. The harder we strive it seems, the more tired we get. And this makes it difficult to do those physical things that would help us lose weight. It's also often confused for laziness.
8. **Injury problems:** Injury is one of the best antidotes to exercise. But often this is a catch 22. Injury (such as joint pain) often comes from being overweight and being overweight comes from being inactive. The cycle has to be broken somewhere
9. **Previous experience with 'exercise':** Winston Churchill once said that when he felt the urge to exercise he lay down until the urge went away. For many people exercise reminds them of tortuous sport or PE at school at which they always failed.
10. **The 'foot-brain' gap:** Like the 'eye-mouth' gap, the 'foot-brain' gap stops us from objectively realising how active we are. Big people find movement painful and therefore think they do more than they do.

Other possible causes

1. **Thyroid problems:** This is highly over-rated and occurs only in a minority of people with a weight problem.
2. **A slow metabolism:** Again an over-rated excuse. However, metabolic may be negatively effected early in life by dieting and inactivity and this can lead to later problems.
3. **'Yo-yo' dieting:** Binging and fasting through life (particularly early adolescence can cause long term adjustments which make lifetime weight loss a problem).
4. **Genetic problems:** Genes are important, and weight problems do run in families. But if the family dog, or cat is also fat, this suggests it's not genes
5. **Early experience:** In women in particular, early life experiences such as physical or sexual abuse can be linked to later weight problems. This requires proper treatment.
6. **Age and sex:** Body fat is greater in women than men and increases gradually with age (although this is not inevitable).
7. **Lifestyle changes after pregnancy and menopause:** Studies have now shown that lifestyle changes at these stages cause weight gain, not some strange unknown factor, or drugs, like hormone replacement therapy (HRT).
8. **Fear of failure:** Fear of failure can drive some people to become overly conscious of weight gain and sub-consciously react by eating more.
9. **Fear of success:** As with failure, success for some people can be a problem with previous failures being the burden they have to carry, but which convince them they could never, truly be successful. Who needs enemies when you've got yourself!

For more information on weight gain go to www.lifestylemedicine.net.au
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