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5 Surprising Reasons Why you Might be Gaining Weight ***Extra calories may not be the only cause of weight gain.***

Here are five factors that might cause an increase in body fat even if you are eating an appropriate amount of food and are physically active.

1. You Might Be Gaining Weight Because of Lack of Sleep

When you don't get enough sleep, your body experiences physiological stress and, biochemically, you store fat more efficiently. Symptoms of insufficient rest include fatigue, low energy levels, nodding off easily, and feeling irritable.

Strive to get eight hours of sleep each night. If you are not getting this, try adding about 15 minutes to your current bedtime and continue to experiment with adding 15-minute blocks until you find the right amount of sleep for you. When you develop good sleeping habits and get regular exercise, you will just plain sleep better.

2. You May Be Gaining Weight Because of Stress

The response to stress (whether it is juggling too many responsibilities, or coping with financial pressures) triggers a biochemical process where our bodies literally go into "survival" mode. Our bodies begin to store fat as fuel, slow down the metabolism, and dump out chemicals (such as cortisol, leptin, and other hormones) which are likely to cause more fat in the abdominal region.

Stress eaters (people who turn to food to relieve stress) tend to prefer high-carbohydrate foods because these foods trigger an increase in the brain chemical serotonin, which has a calming effect -- almost like self-medicating.

3. You May Be Gaining Weight Because of Medications

Some prescription drugs used to treat depression, mood disorders, seizures, migraines, blood pressure, and diabetes can cause weight gain, from a modest amount to as much as 10 pounds per month. Some steroids, hormone replacement therapy, and even oral contraceptives may also cause gradual weight creep.

But it's important to remember that a few extra pounds may be the trade-off of a particular medication for your overall health. Rarely is the problem solved with a change in medication.

If you suspect your medication is causing weight gain, talk with your health care provider about changing your prescription. But whatever you do, don't go off your medication without seeking medical advice.

4. You May Be Gaining Weight Because of a Medical Condition

The most common medical condition that causes weight gain is hypothyroidism, an underactive thyroid condition that can decrease metabolism, causing appetite loss and weight gain.

If you are feeling fatigued or lethargic, have a hoarse voice, intolerance to cold, sleep too much, or experience headaches, you should see your doctor to determine if you have hypothyroidism.

5. You May Be Gaining Weight Because of Menopause

When women reach menopause, they are typically less physically active than when they were younger. Although there is a natural slowing of metabolism, but this slowing is not huge. Hormonal changes can potentially trigger hunger, depression, and poor sleep.

Women going through menopause lose the hormone estrogen, causing their shapes to change, so that fat is more likely to be deposited in the midsection (much like men). The key to avoiding this extra belly fat is to maintain and increase the amount of lean body mass, at the same time increasing your metabolism. Weight lifting and strength training is key to increasing lean muscle tissue and offsets (along with sufficient vitamin D) the bone loss that can occur with menopause.