Understanding How Diabetes May Cause Weight Gain

by AFRA WILLMORE

Does Diabetes Cause Weight Gain?

As a woman with diabetes, I would love to blame my middle-aged spread on my type 2 diabetes but is it true? Does diabetes cause weight gain?

Well, the answer is not a simple yes or no. There can be issues relating to your diabetes causing you to gain weight, or it could be that you are simply overeating and/or not exercising enough.

How Does Diabetes Cause Weight Gain?

When you begin to manage your diabetes effectively you might see some weight gain as your body rehydrates or your weight is affected by your drugs.

If you have made efforts to lose weight through healthy eating and exercise but are still gaining weight, consider asking your doctor to look at your prescription drugs and see if any of them could be substituted. For instance, insulin analogs (human modified insulin) can be an alternative to some other types of insulin and may be less likely to cause weight gain.

For example, insulin medications like meglitinides, sulfonylureas and thiazolidinediones are also associated with weight gain. Even so, weight gain on these medications is far from universal. Studies show that it affects some but not others.

Incidental Causes of Weight Gain With Diabetes

People with diabetes offer suffer from other health conditions too including high blood pressure, thyroid and heart conditions and it might be that medication for those conditions could be causing weight gain. Check with your doctor for advice.

People gain weight for a variety of reasons, which are not always as simple as overeating or not exercising.

- **Anxiety and stress.** Stress and anxiety can be a factor in piling on the pounds for instance, especially chronic (long-term) stress from a difficult marriage, job or personal situation, which can cause an increase in appetite due to the action of the hormone cortisol. Cortisol sticks around when you are stressed and not only does it trigger you to eat more, it signals the body to store glucose as fat, often around your middle.
- **Sleep problems,** Lack of sleep (or too much sleep) for any reason can also have an impact on weight thanks to the effect of appetite-regulating hormones, so make sure you are aiming to get around seven to eight hours each night.
- **A thyroid disorder.** Studies show that thyroid disorders are more common in people with diabetes, so make sure your doctor checks your thyroid hormone levels every year. If you already take medication for a thyroid condition, make sure your healthcare provider checks the amount you take regularly.

Diet and Lifestyle Impact on Diabetes

The first thing to do is take a long hard look at your diet and lifestyle and ask yourself if maybe this might be the issue behind your mysteriously shrinking jeans which are now too tight to sit down in safely.

For example, maybe it is simply that you've never looked up the carb content, sugar and calories in some of your favorite foods. You might be shocked at some of them, especially packaged and processed foods. Even products marketed as health food or "healthy," "low-sugar," or "low-fat" might not be as good for your waistline as they seem.

Tips for How You Can Prevent Weight Gain

Looking for a few ways to prevent further weight gain with diabetes? Below are just a few ways to keep an eye out on what you are eating and other lifestyle adjustments for weight and diabetes management.

Keep a Food Diary

You need to be brutally honest with yourself if you have a food diary. I've been guilty of keeping food diaries in the past and studiously writing everything down that I ate in public and at mealtimes. There have been times where I have "forgotten" to jot down the leftovers or snacks I popped in my mouth in the kitchen when no one could see me.

Cheating the diary only cheats yourself and when your health is at risk is it worth it?

Swallow the guilt and write every mouthful down and check what calories, carbs, fats and sugars you have consumed. You can get apps or find websites which will look up lots of foods for you, even those from restaurants or take-out establishments. Don't guess portion sizes — weigh them.

Don't forget to include drinks especially if you enjoy creamy sugar and carb-laden flavored lattes, a regular alcoholic tipple or fruit juices all which can be calorie-laden and possibly adding to your weight gain.

Start an Activity Diary

Alongside your food diary keep an activity diary, wear a step counter or wrist band activity tracker or download an app on your phone and/or smartwatch which will track your activity for you.

Most of these apps and wearable fitness trackers at the very least track steps per day and many will allow you to tell it what type of activity you are about to undertake including swimming, running, walking or climbing.

If the app or gadget allows you to, set an easy daily target initially and aim to increase your activity week by week. You do not necessarily need to take up running although the British National Health Service Couch to 5K routine with podcasts and an app has proved a very popular and effective tool for many previously reluctant runners.

Other Ways to Get Active

If because of health conditions or any other reason you do not fancy running or the gym or other organized fitness classes, there are still plenty of ways to increase your activity levels without even owning a pair of sneakers.

You could park at the furthest available spot at the mall and walk a little further to the entrance. You could take the steps instead of the escalators or elevators whenever possible.

At home, if you have stairs, you could take items upstairs or downstairs individually instead of collecting a load to take up or down in one go. That would tone your legs and butt nicely too.