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## 5 Secret Reasons You May Be Gaining Weight

Sometimes weight gain is the result of everyday habits such as stuffing our faces with fries and beer at the beach, or flaking on our workouts. But it's not always as simple as calories in and calories out.

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"Some people find that despite proper eating and exercise they simply cannot lose the extra weight," says Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, medical director of the Fibromyalgia and Fatigue Centers and author of *Beat Sugar Addiction NOW!* and *From Fatigued to Fantastic*. "Our research has shown that there are a number of surprising things contributing to this and that when you treat them the weight will often begin to disappear."

SELF asked a team of smartie docs what some of the most common medical culprits are when it comes to weight gain. If you think any of these conditions might be an issue for you, make an appointment with your physician ASAP to get checked out.

### Endocrine disorders

**Why they lead to weight gain:** The most common cause is an under-active thyroid--a.k.a. hypothyroidism--which can mess with your metabolism. Nearly 26 million Americans have this condition, but less than one-third of them are being properly diagnosed or treated, according to Teitelbaum. Thankfully, it can be diagnosed with a simple blood test and controlled with a daily pill. Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) can also cause weight gain because there is excess glucose floating around in your bloodstream, according to Sharon Phelan, MD, a professor at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine.

**Other Symptoms:** HYPOTHYROIDISM: Fatigue, weakness, dry skin, dry hair/hair loss, cold intolerance, depression, decreased libido; PCOS: menstrual disturbances, insulin resistance, oily skin, dandruff, infertility, and high cholesterol.

### Depression

**Why it leads to weight gain:** "The brain chemical serotonin regulates mood and appetite. When there is not enough of this chemical, it can cause changes in appetite," says Anandhi Narasimhan, MD, an adult and child psychiatrist in Los Angeles. "Also, depression can cause isolation and lack of motivation to exercise, which can lead to continued or worsening depression, then more lack of motivation, creating a vicious cycle."

**Other Symptoms:** Feelings of hopelessness, loss of interest in activities, irritability and restlessness, unexplained aches and pains

### Lack of sleep

**Why it leads to weight gain:** Not getting enough sleep can disrupt normal hormone cycles and increase appetite--sending you diving into the carton of Rocky Road. "When people get insufficient sleep, they develop insulin resistance which leads to intense sugar cravings," says Matthew Edlund, MD, director of the Center for Circadian Medicine and author of *The Power of Rest: Why Sleep Alone Is Not Enough*. "At the same time, two major hormones controlling appetite, ghrelin and leptin, also change with even brief sleep deprivation in ways that appear to lead to weight gain."

**Other Symptoms:** You toss and turn all night long and are exhausted 24/7, inability to focus during the day.

### Medications

**Why it leads to weight gain:** A few of the most likely culprits are diabetes medications, oral contraceptives (generally, about 3 to 5 pounds; though, it's important to note that some people lose weight on BCPs), Depo-Provera shots (commonly 5 to 10 pounds a year), and anti-depressant meds (which may be due more to the depression than the medication).

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*Other Symptoms:* Depends on the medication. Talk to your doc about potential side effects anytime you're prescribed new meds.

## Stress

Why it leads to weight gain: Studies have linked increase levels of cortisol—a hormone that's released in response to stress—to excess belly fat in women. "The adrenal gland is the body's stress handler," says Teitelbaum. "Excess stress can initially cause elevated followed by inadequate cortisol levels, both of which can result in weight gain." To treat this problem, start by switching up your attitude: "Whenever you notice that you're getting anxious or worried ask yourself the simple question, 'Am I in imminent danger?' The answer is almost always no, and you'll find that your adrenal glands relax after you realize this."

*Other Symptoms:* Feeling angry or agitated, feeling depressed, feeling frozen under pressure

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