



## Weight Changes

Weight changes, either loss or gain, are common during cancer treatment.

### Weight loss

Quick weight loss can be a sign of dehydration, which can be serious. Weight loss of more than 3 pounds in a week should be reported to your cancer team. There are a number of possible causes for weight loss, including:

- Eating less due to nausea or [poor appetite](#)<sup>1</sup>
- [Diarrhea](#)<sup>2</sup>
- [Vomiting](#)<sup>3</sup>
- [Dehydration](#)<sup>4</sup> (not taking in enough fluid to make up for fluid that's lost)

### What to look for

- Weight loss of 3 pounds or more in a week ( or less than a week)
- Weight loss continues without trying
- Dry skin
- [Fatigue](#)<sup>5</sup> or weakness
- Feeling very thirsty
- Dizziness
- Clothes or rings are too big

### If you want to try to stop losing weight

- Be sure to drink enough water and other liquids. Drink liquids between meals not during, so you won't fill up.
- Choose snacks that are high in calories and protein such as nuts, trail mix, dried fruit, granola, peanut butter, hard-boiled eggs, or cheese.
- Drink smoothies, milkshakes, and nutritional supplements or bars to put more calories and protein in your diet.
- Eat your favorite food any time of the day: Eat breakfast foods for dinner; dinner foods for lunch
- Try adding high-calorie foods such as whipped cream, sour cream, cream cheese, butter, or gravy to what you eat to avoid further weight loss.
- Ask about meeting with a dietitian.

## Weight gain

Some people with cancer find they don't lose weight during treatment. They may even gain weight. This is particularly true for people with [breast](#)<sup>6</sup>, [prostate](#)<sup>7</sup>, or [ovarian cancer](#)<sup>8</sup> who are taking certain medicines or getting hormone therapy or certain kinds of [chemotherapy](#)<sup>9</sup> or [targeted therapy](#)<sup>10</sup>. If you notice you're gaining weight, tell your cancer care team so you can find out what may be causing this change

Many women with breast cancer gain weight during treatment, sometimes due to changes in hormone levels. Some may notice a weight gain if they have [lymphedema](#)<sup>11</sup>. Many of the recommendations for breast cancer patients include a reduced-calorie diet much like those suggested for patients after cancer treatment has been completed. Some people find it helps their [nausea](#)<sup>12</sup> to have something in their stomachs, so they eat more. Others eat more when they're stressed or worried. If you have any questions, talk to your cancer care team about the best diet for you.

. People with certain kinds of cancer might have [swelling](#)<sup>13</sup> in the abdomen (belly) that causes weight gain. Or, sometimes you gain weight because certain anti-cancer drugs cause your body to hold on to extra fluid. If this is the case, your doctor may ask you to talk with a registered dietitian for help with limiting the amount of salt you eat. This is important because salt might cause your body to hold extra water.

An increase in weight over time might also suggest a serious health condition, such as diabetes or high blood pressure. You may be able to tell if you gain or lose weight in a week by the way you feel or the way your clothes fit, or you can weigh yourself on a scale every few days.

## What to look for

- Weight gain of 5 pounds or more in a week or less
- Swollen ankles
- [Shortness of breath](#)<sup>14</sup>
- Feeling puffy or bloated
- Tight shoes, clothes, or rings

## If you want to try to stop gaining weight

- Ask if you need to limit fluid if your ankles are swollen. If you have swelling in your abdomen (belly), limiting fluids may not help and you should call your cancer care team.
- Choose healthier, lower calorie foods.
- Cut back on sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Limit your salt intake.
- Limit food portions especially with high-calorie foods.
- Read food labels to become more aware of portion sizes and calories. Be aware that “low-fat” or “non-fat” doesn’t always mean “low-calorie.”
- Try to walk daily if you can and if it’s OK with your doctor. Talk with your cancer care team about referral to a physical therapist to help you safely increase activity levels.
- Ask about meeting with a dietitian.

## What caregivers can do

- Weigh the patient at the same time every day and record it along with the date. A good time is in the morning before eating or drinking.
- Talk to the cancer team if the patient’s weight loss or weight gain concerns you.
- Watch the patient for other symptoms.

## Call the cancer team if the patient

- Loses or gains more than 3 pounds in a week
- Has shortness of breath

- Feels dizzy or becomes confused

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/eating-problems/poor-appetite.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/eating-problems/poor-appetite.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/stool-or-urine-changes/diarrhea.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/stool-or-urine-changes/diarrhea.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/nausea-and-vomiting.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/nausea-and-vomiting.html)
4. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/eating-problems/fluids-and-dehydration.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/eating-problems/fluids-and-dehydration.html)
5. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/fatigue.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/fatigue.html)
6. [www.cancer.org/cancer/breast-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breast-cancer.html)
7. [www.cancer.org/cancer/prostate-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/prostate-cancer.html)
8. [www.cancer.org/cancer/ovarian-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/ovarian-cancer.html)
9. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/chemotherapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/chemotherapy.html)
10. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/targeted-therapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/targeted-therapy.html)
11. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/lymphedema.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/lymphedema.html)
12. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/nausea-and-vomiting.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/nausea-and-vomiting.html)
13. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/swelling.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/swelling.html)
14. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/shortness-of-breath.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/shortness-of-breath.html)

## References

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National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN). Clinical practice guidelines in oncology: Palliative care. Version 2.2019. Accessed at

[www.nccn.org/professionals/physician\\_gls/pdf/palliative.pdf](http://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/palliative.pdf) on January 21, 2020.

Oncology Nursing Society (ONS). *Anorexia*. Accessed at <https://www.ons.org/pep/anorexia> on January 21, 2020.

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