

Chapter 50

“Don’t measure a man’s success by how high he climbs but how high he bounces when he hits bottom.” —General George S. Patton

MEDICATIONS THAT MAKE YOU FAT

Disclaimer: *We are not doctors or health care professionals, and we are definitely not trying to give any advice as to what anyone should do with their medications. We are simply relating what the research shows, and if you want real advice about your specific situation and medication options, you need to talk to your doctor or pharmacist because they are the experts on this.*

MOST PEOPLE HAVE HEARD THAT there are quite a few prescription drugs on the market that have the potential side effect of making people gain weight. Jeff personally knows two people who suffered from mental illness to the extent that they were hospitalized. Within a year of being medicated with anti-psychotic drugs, they had both gained an extremely large amount of weight.

So how is this possible? Can a drug actually make you gain weight? We always promote on the show that it is just a matter of calories in versus calories out. Is it possible that by taking a certain medication, it could somehow overcome this basic law of energy?

Do medications just increase a person’s appetite so much that they eat more, or can it have an impact on the speed of a person’s metabolism, or is there something else that it could be?

According to the Therapeutic Research Center, a company which produces trade publications for doctors and pharmacists: *“Weight gain is a complex process involving both environmental and genetic factors. It is generally a result from an imbalance between energy intake and total energy expenditure. In addition to the many contributing factors to obesity, weight gain associated with drug therapy is becoming an increasing concern.*

‘Many drugs have been reported to cause weight gain via different mechanisms. Drugs that commonly cause weight gain include mood stabilizers, antidepressants, anti-convulsants, corticosteroids, and certain diabetes medications.’

These are the three ways that they suspect these drugs can make people gain weight:

1. **Your brain has many neurotransmitters that are associated with controlling your appetite.** If you are taking any drugs that work by changing the levels of histamine, dopamine or serotonin in your brain, they are shown to stimulate appetite and make you much more hungry.
2. **Certain antihistamines have sedative effects** and make you feel sluggish and lazy and just by decreasing your regular activity and not burning as many calories each day, this can lead people to gain weight.
3. **There are certain drugs that have the side effect of making people more thirsty,** and many of those people end up drinking more high-caloric drinks that makes them gain weight.

Here are more specifics about common drug classes that most people will end up using during their lifetimes.

1. Birth Control Pills

The most commonly used drugs thought to be associated with weight gain are birth control pills. Depending on which type you take, it may or may not be associated with weight gain. Oral contraceptives can cause a little weight gain by the retention of fluids and by increasing your appetite. They are not associated with any real significant chance of weight gain, and if you take low-dose products you shouldn't expect any.

There is one form of female birth control that shows a higher likelihood of weight gain though. This is the contraceptive injection that lasts three months and is commonly known as Depo Provera. This has been shown to increase appetite, but this doesn't mean that you have to give in to your increased appetite and overeat. Planning out your meals in advance is one of the best ways to deal with this.

2. Antidepressants

The next most commonly prescribed drugs are antidepressants. A quick Google search will turn up that more than 10% of Americans are on antidepressants.

There are a few antidepressants that are not associated with weight gain, but most seem to be. If they are a tricyclic antidepressants, or mono-amine oxidase inhibitors, you will generally put on more weight, the higher the dosage. What seems to happen is

that people get an increase in appetite and cravings for carbohydrates and sweets.

The more common antidepressants are in the category called SSRI's or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors. The good news is that they are more unlikely to cause you to gain weight. Your doctor or pharmacist will be able to tell you what you are taking.

The bottom line with antidepressants is that they increase cravings, but with goal setting and disciplined eating, it is not a guarantee that you will gain weight, any more than living next door to a pizza place is.

3. Mood Stabilizers

This category of drugs are to help stabilize a person's mood. These can be used to treat things such as bi-polar disorder or other types of mental illness. The most common drug that you might hear about is lithium. Lithium is one drug where it is fairly likely that you will gain weight. Studies show that after two years of treatment, the majority of people gain between 11 to 33 pounds of weight. It is associated with a dramatic increase in appetite and thirst in some people, but diet regulation and exercise has been shown to help in the studies.

4. Anti-Psychotics

Schizophrenia is a mental illness that is treated with anti-psychotic drugs. Those drugs are thought to cause dramatic weight gain by a combination of three things. First, they are sedating and make people sluggish and sleepy, they also slow down their metabolic rate, and finally they increase appetite. It isn't a good combination and these factors definitely can cause weight gain.

The two people the Jeff mentioned who gained a lot of weight, were taking anti-psychotics. 15 to 20 years after their bouts with mental illness, their weights are back down and they are healthy. This is one instance where we believe that you should take a medication even if it is likely that you will put on some weight. Deal with your mental health first, then you will have the rest of your life to live a healthy lifestyle and achieve your fat loss goals.

5. Hypoglycemics

The last type of drugs are hypoglycemics which are used to help control blood sugars

in diabetes. Drugs known as insulin sensitizers, reduce insulin resistance in the liver and other cells and can be associated with fluid retention and the increased storage of fat.

Conclusion

The vast majority of medications that might cause the average person to gain weight, does not necessarily have to cause any weight gain. Here is the suggestion of what to do if you believe that weight gain is caused by medications. First in “doctor-ese”:

“The first step in managing clinically relevant drug-induced weight gain is to consider switching to another agent in the same class associated with less weight gain if possible. If discontinuing the offending drug is not possible, behavioral modification and dietary modification with increased physical activity should be considered.”

**Medications are
just another
challenge that
can be overcome.**

Translation: Number one, talk to your doctor about switching medications. Number two, set some fitness goals, watch what you eat and exercise. The bottom line is that medications can be a challenge for people. They can make losing fat or maintaining your weight harder, however they ultimately can't make you gain weight if you don't overeat. The law of calories in versus calories out still applies here. Some drugs can increase your desire to eat, but you ultimately are responsible for what goes in your mouth.

We all have challenges in our lives that makes it hard to be healthy and fit. Some people don't have a good support system in their lives, some have genetics that work against them, some have stressful jobs and fight daily to not use food for comfort. Medications are just another challenge that can be overcome.