

6 Common Medications That Could Be to Blame for Your Weight Gain

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There are sneaky things that cause weight gain that aren't food or exercise. One of them may be prescription medication. Many common prescription drugs can cause some patients to pack on the pounds, though it's unclear whether the drug causes weight gain or the propensity to gain weight is there already. We spoke to Dave Walker, RPh, on behalf of the MedShadow Foundation, a clearinghouse for information on the side effects of medicine, to learn which drugs are most likely to move the needle on the scale.

Oral contraceptives: Depo-Provera, Yazmin

Sure, you're expected to gain weight if you're expecting, but putting on the pounds for *not* trying to get pregnant? According to Walker, all birth control meds release the hormone progesterone. And progesterone can give you the munchies. Besides increasing your appetite, oral contraceptives can also cause water retention aka The Dreaded Belly Bloat (and here's some suggestions on how to get rid of it). The good news is most modern day birth control pills use a lower mix of hormones than older formulations, so weight gain is not as likely as it used to be.

The biggest weight offender may be Depo-Provera. This contraceptive is a shot that makes your period disappear, but studies show that for many women it makes the pounds appear instead.

Alternative: Talk to your Ob-Gyn or primary physician about the IUD or other hormone-free options suggests.

Beta blockers: Metoprolol, Propranolol, Tenormin

High blood pressure or hypertension puts you at risk for a range of health woes from kidney failure to heart attack, so a little spare tire doesn't seem like a big deal by comparison. Still,

weight gain can add other health woes such as metabolic syndrome and diabetes, so you do want to minimize it as much as possible.

Older beta-blockers that are given to lower blood pressure—including Tenormin, Lopressor (metoprolol), and Inderal (propranolol)—have a tendency to cause extra pounds to creep on, reports Health.com. “Just by the nature of what this drug does, lowering the heart rate, it’s also lowering your metabolic rate,” explains Walker. “And if your metabolic rate is going down, you are burning fewer calories and you may need to take precautions to not gain weight.”

Alternatives: Talk to your doctor about changing up your meds to newer beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers, and ACE inhibitors that have less of a weight-gain effect. Also, keep your diet in check with low sugar foods including fresh fruits and veggies, and keep moving. Low impact exercise can help (talk to your physician before starting any new workout routine).

Insulin

More than 1 in every 10 adults over age 20 has diabetes, according to Healthline. The number goes up to 1 in 4 for adults over age 65.

Diabetes 1 and 2 are usually treated with insulin, and some insulin drugs bring on weight gain—an average of 11 pounds in some insulin users.

“The whole principle of taking insulin is to reduce sugars in the bloodstream and get them back into the tissues where they can do their job,” notes Walker. The thing is many people with diabetes are already overweight or prone to being overweight, particularly those with type 2 diabetes. Their lifestyle choices usually reflect a lack of activity to burn off caloric intake, so they are already set up for weight gain.”

Alternative: Discuss an exercise program with your doctor. Even walking as little as 30 minutes a day can be effective. According to the Diabetes Prevention Program, upping physical activity and losing weight could even reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes by over 50 percent. A healthy diet is key. Already on meds? Talk to your doctor about Levemir insulin, which may have fewer side effects.

Antihistamines: Allegra, Zyrtec, Benadryl

A 2010 study in the journal *Obesity* found that men and women taking antihistamines such as Allegra and Zyrtec weighed on average of 9.5 pounds and 4.4 pounds more, respectively, than people not taking those drugs. It seems that blocking histamine can stimulate appetite.

But that’s only if you’re on an antihistamine for the long haul, which Walker doesn’t recommend. “If you’re taking an antihistamine on an as needed basis for hay fever, for example, than any weight gain should be only temporary,” he says. “But staying on an antihistamine long term isn’t a great option for most people.”

Alternatives: This may be a trial and error situation. Talk to your physician about which drug may be best for you, whether you can try a nasal spray instead (which has more localized effects), and if you can take a break from antihistamines in the off-season.

Steroids: Prednisone, Hydrocortisone

Gardening in the yard and end up with poison oak? Steroids may be your new bestie when it comes to treating those insanely itchy red welts. That's because steroids are inflammation fighters. They are usually made up of cortisone and marketed under many brand names, such as Deltasone and Sterapred. However, when steroids are needed long term, for example in cases of arthritis treatment, asthma, or gastrointestinal illnesses, weight gain is possible. These chair yoga moves may relieve your arthritis symptoms no drugs required.

“We know prednisone and cortisone steroids can cause weight gain and possibly water retention. That's just the way the cortisone and our natural body system works. It can increase our appetite,” says Walker. “But that's generally seen with higher doses of the medication and longer treatment.”

Alternative: If you need to take steroids long term, keep an open dialogue with your doctor about dose reduction. According to the Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS.org), sometimes a physician can arrange for you to take steroids on alternate days. Make sure you let your medical practitioner know of any side effects.

Antidepressants: Paxil, Zoloft, Celexa

On top of the symptoms of depression, people who are depressed are at 58 percent greater risk of becoming obese, according to a 2010 study. Some 1 in 6 adults in the U.S. who have been prescribed antidepressants end up suffering from side effects such as weight gain.

“They are supposed to make you feel better, but as much as 10 to 15 percent of the population is prone to gain weight from these medications,” Walker says. He notes that in the 1980s, our overall population weighed about 15 to 20 pounds less than we do now, so we already have a population prone to weight gain. From a scientific standpoint, the serotonin and dopamine in these drugs are neurotransmitters associated with pleasure and happiness—and possibly eating more.

Yet the side effects vary from person to person. Even the drug packaging indicates that it may cause decreased weight *and* increased weight.

Alternatives: Discuss weight gain concerns with your physician and keep track of any upward movement on the scale. Trial and error may be the best way to find the right antidepressant for you. Also, consider asking your doctor about Bupropion (Wellbutrin). According to a study published in the *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, it is the only antidepressant associated with modest long-term weight loss (among nonsmokers).