

The Top 12 Factors That Cause Weight Gain in Chronic Illness and What You Can Do About It! 😊

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If you are like many people who are struggling to lose weight, you may have noticed that no matter what you eat, or how much exercise you do, you can't seem to rid yourself of those extra pounds. In fact, you may still be gaining weight, despite a low-carb diet, and doing all the "right" things.

And if you feel frustrated by this, I want you to know that I can relate. I was slender my entire life, until I hit my 40's and entered pre-menopause, got sick from mold toxicity, lost my husband, and began a prolonged, 3-year benzodiazepine taper at age 44 that made my weight skyrocket.

I started to have to buy new clothes every 6 months once the weight gain started. I was a size 8 in my late 30s, but by the time I hit 47, I was a size 16. Because I am tall, at 5'9", I still didn't look TOO bad, but I was 40-50 pounds overweight for my height.

Fear gripped me as I continued to pack on the pounds, and I was dismayed one day when a doctor told me I had Stage One obesity.

I was dismayed. I hardly ate carbs or sugar, and I walked, 3-4 times per week. But it wasn't enough. Yet I was determined to find a way to lose the pounds, and after much research and working with a doctor who finally "got it" – I was able to shed 35 pounds after just a year.

Now, at age 49, I have only ten to go, and I am a size 12, an average size for my height and age. Of course, I would rather be a 10 or an 8, but it sure beats a size 16, going on 18!

What did I do differently? Read on to find out the most common causes of weight gain in people with complex chronic illness- and in today's toxic society in general. What I share with you here is based on many years of medical research and my personal experience.

1). The Wrong Type and Dosage of Thyroid Medication

Many people with complex chronic illness are prescribed synthetic thyroid hormones to correct hypothyroidism. This is a common condition in which your metabolism slows down, and which causes a number of symptoms such as brain fog, hair loss, depression and fatigue, in addition to weight gain.

The problem is, many people with hypothyroidism are not on the right kind or dose of thyroid hormone, which keeps them tired, dull, and fat.

First, thyroid blood labs are often inaccurate. They only tell you how much thyroid hormone is in your blood, not what your cells are actually using.

So you can have “normal” TSH, Total T4, Total T3 and Free T3 lab tests, and still be hypothyroid and overweight!

Environmental toxins like mold can block thyroid hormone receptors on the cells, leading to a condition called thyroid hormone receptor resistance. To overcome this, you need to take higher doses of T3 than are usual (sometimes very high doses), and dose the hormone based on your symptoms and body temperature, not your lab test results.

What’s more, T3 is the active form of thyroid hormone which your body actually uses, but many doctors prescribe their patients T4, an inactive form of thyroid hormone that their body must convert to T3. The problem is, many people with chronic illness cannot effectively convert T4 to T3. This conversion happens mostly in the liver and people with poor liver function – which is many with chronic illness – can’t convert T4 to T3 well.

To make matters worse, your liver is the organ most affected by hypothyroidism, so how can you expect it to convert T4 to T3 if it doesn't have enough T3 to begin with?

When you can't convert T4 to T3, your body will make Reverse T3 (RT3) from T4 instead. RT3 counters the activity of active T3 in your body, making your hypothyroidism worse!

Further, if you have low morning cortisol, or low cortisol throughout the day, you can be hypothyroid, since cortisol is required by your body to uptake and utilize thyroid hormone.

Low iron also plays a role in thyroid dysfunction, so you need to make sure your iron levels are adequate, too.

Other factors affect thyroid hormone utilization. Dr. David Brownstein describes these in his book, *Overcoming Thyroid Disorders*:
<https://amzn.to/3ypz0k3>.

The good news is – if you work with a competent functional medicine doctor who understands these common issues, and who is willing to diagnose you based on your symptoms and body temperature (which should be 98 degrees or higher) – you can determine what your body actually needs.

You also want a doctor who will prescribe bio-identical T3 hormone that is easy to absorb. If you have low hydrochloric acid in your gut, cellulose, which is used in extended-release thyroid hormone formulas, isn't always the best filler or binder. You may want to try immediate release T3 (with maybe a little T4) using probiotics as a filler. A few compounding pharmacies use these fillers, too.

In the meantime, you may want to ditch the thyroid labs, which are pretty much useless for people with complex chronic illness, and who have thyroid receptor resistance due to toxins like mold. Inflammation can also make T3 uptake and utilization difficult.

When I corrected my symptoms of hypothyroidism with supra-physiological doses of T3, I dropped 20 pounds within two months, my mind began to work better, my mood improved, and my stamina skyrocketed.

This is a very common problem that is well worth looking into! The FB group Adrenal Fatigue and Thyroid Care also has some great info. on how to properly dose thyroid hormone:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/541585909550994>,

2). Adrenal Fatigue

Adrenal fatigue is also common in complex chronic illness, and produces symptoms similar to hypothyroidism. It can also cause anxiety, morning fatigue, trouble standing (due to POTS, or postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome), brain fog, memory loss, blood sugar regulation problems, and insomnia. If you have several of these symptoms, and/or you feel “wired and tired,” chances are, your adrenal glands are not functioning optimally.

You also know you have adrenal fatigue if your saliva cortisol lab tests reveal abnormalities in your body’s daily cortisol pattern. Commonly, people with adrenal fatigue have low morning cortisol, and then too-high cortisol late in the day as well as the evening. Or, they may have low cortisol throughout the day, or too high cortisol throughout the day.

You can find out how exhausted your adrenals are by doing a 24-hour cortisol panel through any number of functional medicine labs like Sabre Sciences: www.SabreSciences.com.

If your morning cortisol is low, or your cortisol is low throughout the day, or too high during the day, chances are, your body is not using thyroid hormone properly, either.

As you know by now, thyroid hormone affects your metabolism. Getting your cortisol balanced by supporting your adrenals can help with thyroid hormone uptake and utilization, and help you to be more active, so that you can burn calories more effectively.

Here are some of my favorite adrenal gland supports:

- Licorice - You only want to take this if your cortisol is too low, but it is powerful for helping your body to retain cortisol. It also helps with POTS or an inability to stand for long periods.
- Siberian ginseng- This great herb helps with stamina and has been used for years by Russian athletes.
- Vitamin C and pantothenic acid. Both of these vitamins are used in large quantities by the adrenals. You may need up to 20 grams of Vitamin C daily, but start slow; at say, 1,000 mg, and work up to bowel tolerance.
- Rhodiola and ashwaghandha – These support cortisol balance throughout the day.
- Bioidentical hydrocortisone. If your cortisol is quite low, you may need bioidentical hydrocortisone in the morning, or both morning

and afternoon, in doses of 5-10 mg, to effectively pull up your cortisol levels to normal.

Hydrocortisone is a very powerful steroid though that should only be used as a last resort, and only in small doses, as the body can become quite dependent upon it. I have found however, that the smaller the dosage, the easier it is to withdraw it once the adrenals are stronger. 5-10 mg dosages should not cause too many issues for most people, but you will want to work with your doctor if you think you need bioidentical hydrocortisone.

In any case, small doses of hydrocortisone can help to speed up your metabolism by increasing your stamina and energy, and aiding in thyroid hormone uptake.

3). Inflammation

Inflammation is still another cause of weight gain, because when your cells are inflamed, nutrients and hormones have a hard time getting into your cells, and cellular waste and toxins have a hard time getting out. This then affects the functioning of your cells, and with that, your energy production and metabolism.

Everyone with complex chronic illness has some degree of inflammation. Removing the root causes of inflammation – such as chronic infections like Lyme and environmental toxins like mold - can help your body to more effectively utilize your hormones and nutrition, and with that, increase the effectiveness of your metabolism.

In the meantime, you can reduce inflammation in your body by doing one or more of the following:

- Following an anti-inflammatory diet (more on this next!)

- Taking anti-inflammatory substances daily like omega-3 EFA's and curcumin, a spice popular in Indian foods
- Taking a mast cell stabilizer (which lowers histamine in your body) with natural agents like quercetin and DAO supplements like Histamine Blocker (note: I receive no compensation for my recommendations here).
- Or, if you know you have high levels of inflammation, you may need a pharmaceutical mast-cell stabilizer such as Cromolyn, ketotifen or doxylamine (Unisom). These antihistamines aid in sleep, too! Be careful if you try ketotifen though, as it can lead to mild weight gain, which you don't want.
- Removing environmental toxins from your body, with sauna therapy, ionic foot baths, coffee enemas and toxin binders. I like chlorella, Pectasol (a type of modified citrus pectin that combats inflammation) and Quicksilver Scientific's Ultra Binder, which contains zeolite, bentonite clay, activated charcoal and a few other ingredients that bind with a variety of toxins in the body, including mold.
- Practicing limbic system or brain retraining, which calms the nervous system, and with that, the immune system. Annie Hopper's Dynamic Neural Retraining (DNRS): www.RetRAINingtheBrain.com has a lot of anecdotal evidence behind it, proving its effectiveness.

4). Toxic Food

Toxic food can be a major cause of weight gain. But you don't just want to eat healthy and avoid artificial, processed foods with added preservatives, gluten and sugar. You also want to eat organic food, as much as possible. This is because non-organic food is laden with contaminants such as pesticides, hormones and antibiotics that cause hormonal imbalances, deplete your GI tract of beneficial bacteria, and

which cause perforations in the gut, leading to Leaky Gut Syndrome. This is a condition in which food particles leach from your gut into your bloodstream, causing inflammation and, you guessed it—weight gain!

Weight gain has also been linked to not having enough beneficial bacteria in the gut (which is caused by antibiotics, which are given to conventionally-raised feed animals, and which you consume when you ingest their meat!). As well, the hormones given to these animals get into your body and cause hormonal imbalances that lead to weight gain, too.

Even organic food contains toxins, but it is much healthier for your body than non-organic food.

You will also want to avoid grains, conventionally-produced dairy products (especially milk, which is super toxic!), sugar and artificial ingredients with difficult-to-pronounce names.

Eat real foods for healthy weight management, that are as close to possible as how God originally created them. As the famous food author Michael Pollen once said, “If your great-grandmother wouldn’t recognize it, don’t eat it.” (paraphrased).

Foods that will help to foster an ideal weight include:

- Organic, pasture-raised animal protein, like beef, lamb, bison, and chicken.
- Smaller wild caught fish, such as salmon, herring and sardines (which are also low in mercury).
- Organic nuts and seeds, in moderation
- Organic green and non-starchy veggies (avoid tubers and root veggies like potatoes and turnips, except for carrots, which have a low glycemic index when eaten raw)

- Healthy oils such as olive, avocado, grapeseed and coconut

Consume fruit in moderation, especially higher glycemic fruit like bananas and mangos, and avoid grains, even healthy ones, as these can spike your blood sugar and contribute to weight gain.

Enjoy a low-calorie, low-carb dessert on occasion, but in general, limit your carbs to 15-20 grams per meal, and possibly 25 if you are active or younger.

5). Unhealthy Mealtime and Sleep Habits

On that note, did you know that when you eat and sleep, can have a major impact upon your weight?

God created us with a circadian rhythm; or specific times in which our bodies are designed to get up, eat and go to bed. And the more that we can align ourselves with that rhythm, the more we will reap positive benefits in our health, including our weight.

Basically, we were meant to rise with the sun and sleep shortly after sunset, and to eat at regular times daily. The body likes patterns.

Studies have shown in fact, that people who go to bed late, or work the night shift, have greater problems with weight gain. The more you can get up early and go to bed early – the better off your metabolism and entire system will be!

I lost a few extra pounds when I began getting up at 9 AM and taking walks in the morning sunshine. Before that, I would get up at 11 AM or sometimes even noon, and not go out into the sun until later in the day. But morning sunshine is much more powerful for supercharging your

mitochondria—or your cell’s little energy furnaces—than afternoon sun. I surmise this is part of the reason why I was able to lose weight, in addition to the change in my bedtime/waking hours.

When you supercharge your mitos, your cells can also more effectively utilize your nutrients and hormones. For instance, thyroid hormone uptake and utilization are powerfully affected by your mitochondrial function, so the more that you can fuel your mitos with exercise and sun – the more you are likely to maintain a healthy weight.

I know that many people discourage nighttime snacking, but if you have hypoglycemia or blood sugar regulation problems, you actually want to have a good-sized protein and healthy fat snack at bedtime (such as a whey protein bar, some cheese and nuts, or a couple of poached eggs), to keep your blood sugar stable. If you don’t, your adrenals will release adrenaline during the night to mobilize glycogen, or stored sugar from your liver- to fuel your cells, and this too, can lead to weight gain over time.

6). Lack of Movement

This one may seem obvious to you, and if you are battling a serious illness, you may be wondering how you can exercise – but I’m here to tell you that moving your body to lose weight doesn’t have to mean doing vigorous exercise.

Yet we humans were created for movement, and it’s good for our health and metabolism. Many of our ancestors were farmers; and further back in history, hunters and gatherers. This meant that they were constantly on the move. And they were probably not overweight (well, for other reasons too, but their active lifestyle probably had a lot to do with it).

You just want to move throughout the day—whether that means taking a 30-45-minute walk, swimming, taking a Pilate’s class; rebounding on a trampoline for 15 minutes, doing household chores, walking up and down the stairs throughout the day, washing your car or your pet; walking around the mall, moving your arms and legs from your bed –or doing just anything and everything to get your limbs going and the oxygen flowing.

In fact, doing a lot of little movements throughout the day, such as going up and down the stairs periodically, may be just as or even more beneficial and effective than doing one short burst of exercise, like a 20-minute walk—and being sedentary the rest of the day.

Being active can be difficult if you are battling a complex chronic illness that causes chronic fatigue, but if you can fix your adrenal glands and thyroid with some of the above-mentioned tools, chances are, you will have more energy to move or get up and about.

If pain or other hindrances keep you from moving much, consider doing gentle exercises from your bed, like bicycle pedaling while lying on your back, doing some light stretching on a rubber ball or a few gentle Pilate’s exercises, or swimming—the latter two of which are often good for people with joint or muscle pain.

Movement increases your metabolism and also supercharges your mitochondria, those inter-cellular energy furnaces that I mentioned about earlier, and so it is still an important factor in weight loss. The more you move, the more you speed up your metabolism.

Also, whenever you do weight-bearing exercises like Pilate’s, this builds muscle, and muscle cells are more effective at burning fat than other types of cells. So when you build muscle, you also speed up your

metabolism. I lost a few extra pounds by doing Pilate's twice a week, in addition to walking several days per week, for 30 minutes at a time.

That said-doing intense exercise, like weight lifting, running or high-intensity aerobics, can actually cause you to gain weight if you have adrenal fatigue. Yep, you heard right! This is because when your adrenals are burned out, when you overwork them by doing heavy exercise, you stimulate them to produce cortisol and adrenaline, which in excess, can cause weight gain. You don't want to work out to the point of exhaustion, as this is counter-productive, too.

Just move as much as you can throughout the day, without making yourself feel worse. That's the main goal here, and whatever movement you do, will help you to maintain a healthy and stable weight.

7). Electromagnetic Fields (EMFs)

You may be surprised to learn that electromagnetic fields cause weight gain, by causing blood sugar dysregulation and insulin resistance, among other problems. Insulin is a hormone that delivers glucose into your cells for energy, and when insulin resistance occurs, it's because your body is having trouble getting glucose into your cells. And insulin resistance can make you fat, too.

I have observed that whenever I get on my cell phone in the early morning before breakfast, my blood sugar tanks and I have to eat sooner, and quite often more than usual! The same happens whenever I spend an extended amount of time on the phone.

The more time you spend on a computer, cell phone or other electromagnetic device, the more your blood sugar may become imbalanced and your cells insulin-resistant.

I therefore recommend using these electronic gadgets judiciously, and countering the effects of EMFs by turning off your Wi-Fi router at night, using a Safe Sleeve for your phone (which blocks many of the EMFs from it), limiting your time on your computer and cell phone, and choosing not to use so-called “smart” devices, either in your home or on your person.

What’s more, high EMFs in your sleep environment can disrupt your sleep, causing insomnia, and with that, more weight gain. Because insomnia is another major cause of weight gain, in addition to EMFs.

8). Insomnia

So on that note...insomnia is common in complex, chronic illness, and lack of deep, quality sleep has been linked in many studies to weight gain.

If you aren’t sleeping deeply or for enough hours, chances are, your metabolism is being affected. I realize some people need only a few hours of sleep at night, but most people with complex chronic illness need somewhere between 7-9 hours of quality rest. If you are sleeping more or less than that, your weight may be affected, but studies show in general that people who sleep longer have fewer weight problems.

By the way, insomnia was one of my biggest battles over the years, so I had to learn the hard way how to address the multiple causes of insomnia in complex chronic illness.

In fact, I learned so much that I even wrote a book on sleep that you may find to be helpful, entitled *Beyond a Glass of Milk and a Hot Bath: Advanced Sleep Solutions for People with Chronic Insomnia*.

This book contains some novel solutions for improving sleep that I don't think you will find elsewhere. To learn more, click here:

<https://amzn.to/3ZRm56g>.

In the meantime, if you have a hard time getting sufficient, deep quality rest, I recommend that you do one or more of the following:

- Turn off any electromagnetic devices at least two, if not four hours, before bedtime. That means cellphones, your computer, and other glowing gadgets. The blue light from these devices tells your brain that it is daytime, which is not what you want!
- Turn off your Wi-Fi and any EMF devices in your room. EMF's from Wi-Fi and the like can keep you from getting deep, restful sleep.
- Make sure your room is dark, quiet and cold!
- Try some 5-HTP, GABA or L-theanine, which are amino acids that foster deep rest.
- Take melatonin, to help regulate your circadian rhythm.
- If you have lots of inflammation, take an antihistamine like doxylamine (Unisom) or ketotifen. These are better than diphenhydramine (Benadryl) or sedatives like diazepam, which have been linked to dementia and long-term neurological problems.
- Low-dose doxepin. Doxepin is an antidepressant that when taken in tiny doses, aids in sleep but doesn't cause any side effects. I mean, at dosages like .03 ml in a 10 ml solution. It's pretty amazing!

9). Depression

Depression can lead to weight gain, for a variety of reasons. First, depression has been linked to overeating—especially sweet things and

carbs, in the body's attempt to boost dopamine and serotonin, two neurotransmitters that positively affect mood.

Depression has also been linked to inflammation, low thyroid function, adrenal fatigue, and a general lack of energy. To combat depression, you want to first fix your thyroid and adrenals, by following the suggestions I mentioned earlier.

Make sure you aren't deficient in other nutrients either, especially B-vitamins, which are cofactors in neurotransmitter (NT) production, and amino acids that your body uses to make feel-good NT's, such as tryptophan, 5-HTP, L-phenylalanine and L-tyrosine.

SAMe is another very useful supplement that boosts mood, as does St. John's Wort.

Many chronic infections and toxins such as mold, Lyme disease and heavy metals, can cause depression as well, so getting diagnosed and treated for these and/or other chronic infections is similarly important. In the meantime, you can take an antihistamine like doxylamine or ketotifen to help reduce brain inflammation, which is part of the reason for depression in complex chronic illness.

Healing from depression isn't just about fixing your chemistry though. It is about healing from the spiritual and emotional causes of the condition as well, such as trauma and demonic oppression.

It is beyond the scope of this short E-book to share solutions for every cause of depression, but my full-sized 2019 book on depression, entitled, *Healthy, Happy and Free: Spirit-Soul-Body Solutions for Healing from Depression*, is a comprehensive resource on how to heal from depression by addressing the health of your spirit, soul and body—

through a relationship with God, mind-body tools to heal your mind and soul, and natural medicine to heal your body.

Healthy, Happy and Free contains tools, tips and suggestions for healing from the many factors that cause or contribute to complex chronic illness. It represents my accumulated knowledge of over nearly two decades of research in medicine and divine healing, and my experience of having battled depression caused by mold, Lyme disease, traumatic events, and benzodiazepine drug withdrawal.

10) Poor Gut Health

Your microbiome, which is partly made up of hundreds of beneficial types of bacteria that line your gastrointestinal tract and skin, can have a huge impact upon your weight, too. Gut microbes play a role in weight regulation, your circadian rhythm, and many other important processes in your body.

So when that microbiome becomes imbalanced, by antibiotics – which kill off the beneficial bacteria there – pesticides, and pathogenic organisms, like fungi, viruses and harmful bacteria, which enter your body through the air you breathe and the food and water you drink – you can have all kinds of problems, including weight gain.

When I took long-term antibiotics for Lyme disease, shortly thereafter, I began to gain weight. My circadian rhythm also shifted, and I could no longer go to bed by 11 PM. In fact, it became difficult for me to sleep before 2 AM, for many years thereafter. Over time, I learned that those beneficial bacteria that God gave us, played a major role in regulating my circadian rhythm and my weight.

Healing from the effects of those drugs was not so easy, but I learned a few valuable things along the way, which I want to share with you here.

First, if you have ever taken antibiotics for any length of time – chances are, your gastro-intestinal microbiome is imbalanced. The good news is, you can fix that by adding back to your body the beneficial or friendly bacteria that were depleted by the drugs or pathogenic organisms.

You can do this by taking a combination probiotic that contains many different strains of bacteria. This is still not likely to be sufficient though, as most probiotic products contain about 10 or fewer types of beneficial bacteria, and your natural microbiome contains over 400!

Therefore, to augment the restoration of your gut, you'll want to consume probiotic foods such as sauerkraut, kimchi and kombucha, on a regular basis.

Perhaps one of the best things you can do though—if you can gain access to it—is a fecal microbiota transplant (FMT). This involves receiving, either via a rectal insertion or capsules – the microbiome of a healthy donor. While this kind of therapy is not approved in the USA except for the treatment of *Clostridium difficile*, there are a few clinics around the world that do FMT.

FMT for weight loss has been proven in studies. For instance, several studies on mice have shown that obese mice that received the microbiome of slender mice (via a fecal transplant) – ended up losing weight! So FMT is a promising tool that may be developed more in the years to come.

In the meantime, you can care for your GI tract by taking probiotic supplements or foods regularly; avoiding toxic food that contains pesticides, hormones and antibiotics, and avoiding food that damages the GI tract, like gluten and grains.

11). Estrogen and Progesterone Imbalances When you have an excess of either estrogen or progesterone (which happens when you are a pre-menopausal or menopausal woman), this can lead to weight gain, too. Many of us are overweight from xenoestrogens in the environment, which are toxins that act like estrogens in the body and cause weight gain. Plastics are one major source of xenoestrogens.

Therefore, detoxifying your body from these “fake” estrogens can do a lot to help balance your estrogen. Sauna therapy helps to remove toxic compounds that act like estrogens (such as plastic), as do some natural substances such as DIM, or Diindolylmethane and calcium-D-glucarate, both of which you can purchase as supplements.

If you are deficient in either estrogen or progesterone – taking supplemental hormones can help to balance out these two important hormones. You’ll want to first get tested by a reputable lab though, such as Sabre Sciences, and then supplement accordingly. For more information, see: SabreSciences.com.

12) Stress

Finally, stress may be one of the most important and yet overlooked causes of weight gain. This is because whenever you are under stress: rushing around, living like a “Type A” personality, taking on too many responsibilities or living in contentious or difficult relationships – this causes your adrenal glands to secrete adrenaline and cortisol, and eventually burn out. Both of these hormones, when produced in excess, can cause weight gain.

Then, once your adrenals are fatigued, this affects your thyroid hormones, too. By now you know that adrenal and thyroid hormones that are not functioning optimally lead to a wildly dysfunctional metabolism!

So, I encourage you to learn how to pace yourself daily; not rush, and live out of a mindset of trust, relaxation and peace. Brain retraining programs can help to cultivate this mindset, so you may want to follow and practice a program such as Dynamic Neural Retraining or the Gupta Program. For more information, see: www.RetainingTheBrain.com and GuptaProgram.com.

Most importantly of all, spend time in meditative prayer daily, and in cultivating a relationship with God –the giver of all peace, love, wisdom and wellbeing! I guarantee that you won't regret it. 😊