



Complementary Medicine Centre

Weight Problems

Issues & Suggestions

What Affects People's Weight?

Some people have difficulty losing weight; others find it difficult to gain weight. Both problems may cause distress. There are many factors that contribute towards weight management difficulties, including:

Hormone Imbalances:	contraceptive pill, thyroid disturbances, diabetes, menopause.
Digestive Disturbances:	constipation, diarrhoea, inability of the digestive tract to absorb nutrients (e.g. coeliac disease, irritable bowel syndrome).
Poor Diet:	vitamin or mineral deficiencies, blood sugar imbalances.
Stress:	can cause over-eating, under-eating or irritable bowel syndrome
Lifestyle choices:	exercise, shift working

There are many contributing factors to weight, however at the simplest levels weight gain / loss depends on the balance between calories taken in (absorbed into the body) and calories used as energy by the body (during rest, exercise and sleep).

Important Concepts and Factors

Calories Many people try to control their weight by calorie counting, ensuring that they eat a certain number of calories each day. It is important to be aware though that some foods contain 'empty calories'. These foods have limited nutritional value beyond being a source of calories. This means that although we may eat sufficient calories to survive the day the food has not supplied our body with sufficient vitamins, minerals and amino acids, therefore we still feel hungry. Many processed foods and refined carbohydrates contain *empty calories*.

Glycaemic Index (GI) The glycaemic index is a measure of how quickly sugar is released into the body from each food. Some foods have a high glycaemic index, indicating that blood sugar levels increase rapidly after ingestion, whereas others have a

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low glycaemic index, indicating that the sugar is released slowly into the bloodstream over time. Sugar highs and lows vs balance The best foods to eat are the ones with a low gi, as they release sugar into the bloodstream at a steady rate and keep the sugar cravings at bay and the energy levels more consistent. These foods include: wholemeal bread, wholemeal pasta, oat cakes, porridge, brown rice, fruit and vegetables, pulses, nuts and seeds. Foods with a high gi index include refined carbohydrates e.g. white bread, white sugar, breakfast cereals, biscuits etc. which will give a surge of energy which quickly runs out, leaving you craving more food to sustain yourself. The body's use of insulin also plays a role in this pattern.

Glycaemic Load (GL) can be considered to be an improved measure of the glycaemic index. It takes account of the fact that some foods contain fibre and this will slow their release of sugar into the bloodstream.

Exercise can help raise mood, metabolism and calorie use. Exercise is essential to raise the body's metabolism as well as possibly improving mood. Along with a sensible and healthy eating pattern exercise can help tone up the body and use up calories.

Mood. Mood can be a big factor in how we eat. When we feel down, we automatically want something sweet to make us feel better. This of course gives us an instant buzz and a feel good factor, which is normally short lived. Eating foods high in minerals and vitamins eg fruit, vegetables, pulses, grains etc help give us what we need, not only for our bodies, but also our brains, so that they function better. The benefits of these changes may only be seen over the long term, they are not normally a "quick fix". Important foods for mood include sources of essential fatty acids (such as fish or flax seed oil) and making sure you are adequately hydrated (drink sufficient water).

Rapid crash diets (or weight gain programmes) may actually make the problem worse because as soon as you stop the diet and start eating as you did before, the weight problems return and may get worse. If the situation is to be resolved long term it is important to look at the **way you eat, what you eat, when you eat** and see if there is either a **physical** cause (thyroid problems, diabetes, age, etc) or an **emotional** cause (e.g. anorexia, stress etc.) as problems can be caused by both.

Metabolism is another key issue in weight management. A person's metabolic rate affects a person's rate of use of calories and can explain why some people can eat anything but not gain weight whereas others gain weight very easily.

Hungry or Thirsty?

It is very important to distinguish between hunger and thirst as some people tend to eat when they are thirsty rather than to drink a suitable fluid. The sensation of being thirsty is a guide to being dehydrated however urine colour may be a more useful guide. A straw colour is acceptable, a yellow colour is not. Chernoff (1999) recommends a total fluid intake of 30 ml/kg body weight with a minimum of 1,500 ml (6 glasses) per day.

Important Vitamins and Minerals

Although a balanced diet is critical there are some vitamins and minerals that can be taken as a supplement specific to your needs if required.

Zinc – essential for a healthy immune system, important for sense of smell which is used by the body to get the digestive enzymes excited at the smell of food!

Vitamin Bs especially B6, B3, - essential for the metabolising of carbohydrates and may be helpful in overcoming low energy.

Chromium – is useful to help control blood sugar levels. If you eat something high in sugar you get an immediate rush of energy followed by a crash where you feel tired and worn out and immediately crave another sugary rush. Chromium works in levelling out these highs and lows and can be very successful.

We often suggest that people consider taking a good high strength multivitamin such as Solgar's VM75 to ensure that their intake of key nutrients is adequate.

Other Useful Supplements

5HTP can increase a person's serotonin levels which can affect mood and help to keep your spirits up.

Phase 2 white bean extract (for example Higher Nature's Freecarb)—is a natural supplement derived from white kidney beans that blocks most of the carbohydrate absorption from foods like pasta, potatoes and bread and can help you lose weight when used with a healthy diet and exercise.

Weight-building protein shakes: some people want to build up muscle or increase their weight, and weight protein shakes can help, along with a regular exercise programme, sensible eating and drinking.

Apple cider vinegar has a reputation as a weight loss aid. We have not seen conclusive evidence but do know people who feel it helps. Consider trying it for yourself.

Helix slim from A. Vogel is a Jerusalem artichoke extract that may help reduce sugar cravings by reducing the sugar lows and may also benefit the liver. It may be appropriate if you are someone prone to snacking (also consider planning to have a snack before you need it to avoid feeling hungry).

Cellulite is often a source of irritation to women especially. Most people will know it as “orange peel skin” as it makes the skin puffy due to the deposits of fat. It occurs on the thighs, tummy, upper arms, or buttocks and can be caused by poor circulation to the area, a build up of toxins and can be associated with hormone imbalance. There are many products out there that claim to clear it up and some people find these useful, but it needs to be done with a change lifestyle and eating habits. Regular exercise, plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, limited alcohol, no smoking, plenty of water and reduction of tea, coffee and processed foods can make a difference, as can dry skin brushing.

Herbs for digestion and weight loss

Although we have focussed mainly on carbohydrate metabolism and mood, digestion can also be an important factor. In order for food to be properly broken down to provide energy, the digestive system needs to be functioning properly. Digestive enzymes in the liver help this process along and if the liver is sluggish or over taxed (due to alcohol, medication, poor diet or stress) then the digestion slows down causing constipation,

indigestion, bloating and an overall tired sluggish feeling, unaddressed this can lead to weight gain or loss and also to other problems such as psoriasis, eczema and overgrowth of an intestinal yeast which causes candida problems. Some herbs to consider are;

Artichoke – *Cynara scolymus* – stimulates metabolism, assists digestion of fats.

Dandelion root – *Taraxacum officinale* – regulates pancreas (which secretes digestive enzymes to help in digestion of food), rich in vitamin, A B and C and nutrient minerals. Stimulates the liver and bile flow which helps in the breakdown of fats.

Gentian – *Gentiana lutea* – increases digestive enzymes to break down food

Fenugreek – *Trigonella foenum-graecum* – may help balance sugar levels.

Kelp/bladderwrack (seaweed) – may help to balance metabolism

Nourishing herbs for weight gain

Alfalfa – *Medicago sativa* – very nourishing has a lot of minerals and vitamins as well as digestive enzymes which help with breakdown of food.

Slippery elm - *Ulmus fulva* – provides nutrients as well as bulk which keeps the digestion healthy.

Irish moss – *Chondrus crispus* – useful for thin people wanting to put on weight, very nourishing and also lowers blood cholesterol levels.

Saw Palmetto – *Serenoa serulatta* – may play a role in increasing muscle bulk.

Conclusion

In this short leaflet we have hopefully given ideas of things that could help you. Our diet is very important as our bodies are under an amazing amount of stress on a daily basis and require the essential nutrients to function at their optimum.

Although body weight is an indicator of health, achieving a weight and feeling that you are happy with through proper eating habits is a better aim. Although the food in your diet and body weight are thought to be important factors in the occurrence of conditions such as diabetes (diet high in sugar), cardiovascular disease (diets high in saturated fats) and cancers (diets low in fresh fruit and vegetables and whole foods) it is probably more important to be happy with how you look and your natural weight, than to worry about being perfect as stress and anxiety are also important risk factors in health.

Therapies

Although this leaflet has focussed on self-help you could consider:-

Hypnotherapy – reaches our inner unconscious self, through deep relaxation. It can address habits or emotional problems related to weight issues.

Medical Herbalism - can help in many ways, aiding digestive processes or dealing with the underlying problems, e.g. stress, hormone fluctuations, blood sugar levels, candida etc.