

## **Weight Gain Dogs Many Pills**

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Like many patients I've been seeing after our long, Midwestern winter, the 55-year-old woman in my office had put on 15 pounds since her last visit. Usually I would chalk it up to a lack of exercise and overeating, but she swore that she had been watching her diet and working out daily.

I ruled out thyroid trouble, a frequent cause of otherwise unexplained weight gain. She redoubled her efforts to shed the extra weight but a month later hadn't made any progress. I suspected that Elavil, one drug she started taking last year for chronic pain, might be the culprit. Within a month of stopping the medicine, she had lost five pounds.

It's an unpleasant truth, but prescription medications for many common problems can make you fat. I start to suspect medicine is to blame if patients on a new drug gain more than five pounds in a month without a change in their diet or physical activity.

Balancing the benefits of drug treatment and the side effects can be especially tricky for diabetics. Take, for instance, a 52-year-old patient who had been working with me to get his blood sugar under control for the last six months. We started out with a metformin, a generic medication that lowers blood sugar without weight gain. But the daily pill wasn't quite strong enough to control his diabetes.

We considered Byetta, a newer injectable medication that lowers blood sugar and helps many people lose weight. But he has no drug coverage and couldn't afford the couple of hundreds of dollars a month it would cost.

We settled on glipizide, an older diabetes tablet that he could get for \$4 per month at a local retailer. It worked to lower his blood sugar back to the normal range, but at a cost of five extra pounds the first few months he's been on it. Because obesity is a leading cause of type 2 diabetes, adding more weight with a medication compounds the health problem. About 80% to 90% of type 2 diabetics are obese.

Diabetic patients often have to choose between cheaper meds and a thinner waist. Many newer diabetes medications are expensive and come with steep co-payments for my patients with insurance. When costs count, my patients sometimes end up with the less expensive drugs that can cause weight gain.

Still, taking a newer, expensive diabetes drug doesn't always help a patient dodge a weight problem. Patients taking both Actos and Avandia, which aren't available as generics, put on weight in clinical trials. (For more information, see this [overview of diabetes drugs](#)).

Antidepressants called SSRIs, such as Paxil and Zoloft, have caused some of my depressed patients to gain weight. But the reaction is hard to predict. Some patients eat more when they're depressed and others don't.

Recently, when an overweight, depressed patient came in, I started her on generic Prozac that helped her depression. She lost three pounds in the first two weeks. Sometimes weight fluctuations are due to a drug and other times they signal a return to normal eating habits.

I've seen several patients gain weight after steroid injections for aching backs caused by degenerated disks. One elderly patient got good pain relief from the injections, but wouldn't repeat them a year later because she was afraid of gaining 15 pounds again.

Blood pressure medications like Inderal and Cardura can contribute to weight gain. Cardura is also used for relieving symptoms of an enlarged prostate. Inderal is an older blood pressure medicine, and I prescribe it most often to help prevent medicine migraine headaches rather than to manage hypertension. Thankfully there are many drugs for blood pressure and migraine headaches that don't cause weight gain.

Another patient of mine gained 20 pounds in a year after starting Prilosec for his heartburn. About 1% of patients on medications called proton pump inhibitors, such as Prilosec, Nexium and Prevacid, experience weight gain. Some people lose weight on them, though. For my patient, his stomach felt so good after Prilosec that he could eat anything he wanted -- and he did.

If you've gained weight and suspect your medication is the cause, don't just stop taking it.

Examine your diet and exercise regimen critically. Those are the more likely culprits. Then talk with your doctor. Fortunately, there are a number of alternatives for most medications that pack on the pounds.