



New Idea
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6 surprising reasons for WEIGHT GAIN

Take a different approach to win your bulge battle

There's no doubt eating fried food, big portions and decadent desserts leads to weight gain. And when we eat more kilojoules than we burn with physical activity, we'll also stack on the kilos.

But what if you're doing everything right and the numbers continue to climb? Here, we look at some other hidden factors...

1 THE WAY YOU'RE EATING

It may not be what you're eating but how you're eating it that piles on the weight. Do you eat quickly or skip meals then wolf down a big dinner? Accredited practising dietitian Dr Joanna McMillan Price says this is a sure-fire way of bloating. 'A lot of people ask me if they have a food intolerance,' she says. 'They don't - it's just the way they're eating.'

Being distracted can also lead to overeating. 'We take less notice of what we're eating and tend to feel less satisfied by what we've had,' health and clinical psychologist Dr Leah Brennan says. 'Your brain gets information from your eyes and stomach and uses that to determine how full you are. If you're distracted you're more likely to continue eating when you're not hungry.'

2 WATER RETENTION

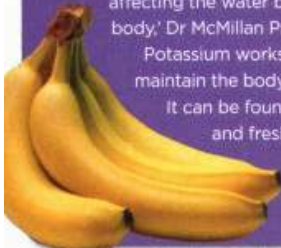
A diet high in sodium can lead to water retention that can show up on the scales, Dr McMillan Price says. While a small amount of salt is important for good health (no more than 4g per day), if the levels are too high, the body will retain more water to try to flush it out, she explains.

About 75 per cent of the salt Aussies consume comes from processed foods.

'If you're having too much sodium and not enough potassium, that could be affecting the water balance in your body,' Dr McMillan Price says.

Potassium works with sodium to maintain the body's water balance.

It can be found in meat, milk and fresh fruit - bananas are high in potassium - and vegies.

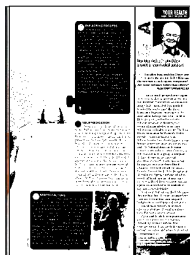


3 Medical condition

Some underlying medical conditions can also present themselves through weight gain. One in particular is hypothyroidism - a deficiency in the production of the thyroid hormone.

'The thyroid hormone is like a thermostat for metabolism. If it's low it can affect your weight,' explains Dr Ron McCoy of The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. 'It can come on really quite slowly and out of the blue. So, if you do have unexplained weight gain it's worth getting that checked out.'

A blood test to check your thyroid levels can diagnose the condition, which can then be treated with medication.



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4 THE AGEING PROCESS

As we age, we lose lean muscle mass, which helps keep our metabolism kicking over. And for women, hormonal changes also occur with the onset of menopause. Not only do women tend to put on a few kilos during this phase, but it's usually around the middle, dangerously close to the vital organs.

'It's a really important time to monitor weight gain, to always know what your healthy weight should be,' Dr McCoy says. 'And if it starts to go up and doesn't drop back down, it's best to see your doctor sooner rather than later.'

While cardio exercise, such as walking, continues to be important as you age, try to incorporate some resistance training, such as using hand weights while you walk, to develop and maintain muscle. 'The take-home message is don't sit at home feeling guilty

about weight gain.

Get out and do something about it,' Dr McCoy says.



5 YOUR MEDICATION

Checking your medicine cabinet could be worthwhile if you have unexplained weight gain. Sometimes prescription drugs, including those used for migraines, depression and blood pressure, can be the culprit, says Dr McCoy. Some steroids, used for conditions such as asthma, hormone replacement therapy and the oral contraceptive, may also be a cause.

But it's important to remember a few extra kilos may be well worth the trade-off for what a particular medication does for your overall health. 'If you're finding you're gaining weight related to medication, it's really important to discuss that with your doctor because you can look at adjusting the medication,' Dr McCoy advises. 'With antidepressants you can usually offset the weight gain with exercise and this can also improve your general mood.'

6 STRESS FACTORS

Tune into your stress levels to help beat the bulge. We're more likely to skip healthy eating and exercise habits when life is hectic, and research has now linked the stress hormone cortisol to weight gain. If the body pumps out too much cortisol, it can lead to excess abdominal fat - a dangerous precursor to diseases such as type 2 diabetes.

Dr Brennan says many people overeat when stressed, and suggests keeping a food diary. 'Most people assume they're eating because they're hungry but then realise much of their eating is happening for other reasons,' she says. 'If you can stick to healthy habits and routines it's a much more effective way of managing your stress.' **NI**

By Vera Deral



YOUR HEALTH

HEALTH • FITNESS • WELLBEING • DIET

Q&A



New Idea medico Dr John D'Arcy answers all your medical questions

Q I'm often busy and don't have time to go to the doctor. Is it OK to use the internet to look up my symptoms? Are some websites better than others?

MELISSA DOHERTY, SUNNYBANK HILLS, QLD.

A From a health perspective it's a good idea but, like all good ideas, the devil is in the detail. The internet has a wonderful array of information but it's important to select the source carefully. If you know your diagnosis, go straight to the association that represents the condition.

Here are a few good websites to try:

- For information on diabetes, visit www.australiandiabetescouncil.com.
- For women's health issues, try The Jean Hailes Foundation for Women's Health website - www.jeanhailes.org.au.
- If you're concerned about changes in your breasts or for information on ovarian cancer, visit The National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre website - www.nbocc.org.au.
- If it's a symptom or group of symptoms that are of concern, try your state government's health information website. I always go first to the Better Health Channel - www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au. I also fall back on the Federal Department of Health and Ageing's website, which is www.healthinsite.gov.au - it also urges you to ring Health Direct on 1800 022 222, a person-to-nurse healthline available at any time in selected states.

Keep away from sites in the US because they use local facts that may not apply here. However, www.webmd.com has good background on conditions and symptoms.

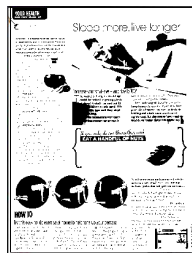
You should never rely on internet information but use it to craft questions you'd like your doctor to answer.

If you want to talk to your pharmacist about medications, visit the National Prescribing Service's website first - www.nps.org.au. It has good information on your medication and advice to go with it.

ASK DR JOHN FOR ADVICE

Do you have a question for Dr John? Post it to Dr John D'Arcy, New Idea, GPO Box 7814, Sydney, NSW 2001, or email health@newidea.com.au.

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YOUR HEALTH

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TOP 5 NATURAL PAIN RELIEVERS

Whether it's a headache or backache, we've all experienced pain at some point. There are plenty of pharmaceuticals on the market, but what if you want to go the natural route? Here are some alternative ways to get relief...

1 EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

Unlike other vegetable oils, extra virgin olive oil contains powerful agents called phenolics that naturally halt inflammation similar to the drug ibuprofen. Just add a dash to a salad or use in your general cooking.



2 OMEGA-3

The good oils found in fish, such as salmon, or avocado also have an anti-inflammatory effect, meaning it's good for combating pain, according to recent US research.

3 ACUPUNCTURE

Used in China for thousands of years, this natural therapy relies on pressure points in the body, which are said to control energy (chi) flow.

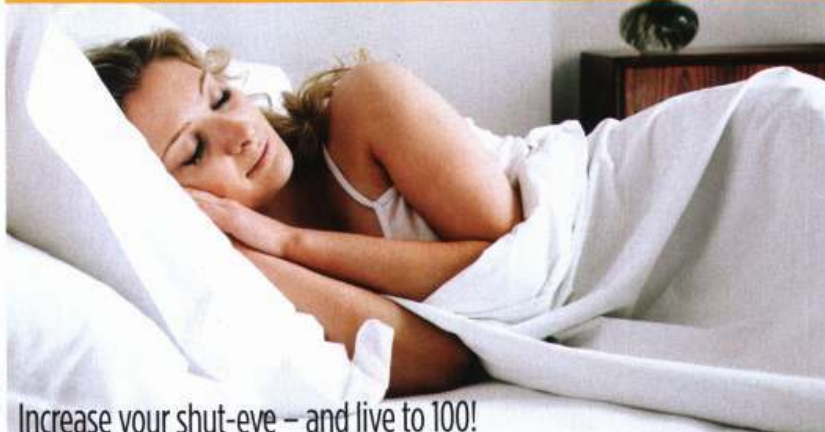
4 AROMATHERAPY

Naturopath Emma Sutherland recommends lavender oil for pain as it has an analgesic effect. 'If a woman has period cramps, I'll get her to mix it with some jojoba oil and rub it into her lower belly,' she says.

5 MIND POWER

Thinking of a loved one can reduce the severity of pain, according to a US study. Researchers asked women to think of their partners while being given heat stimuli. The group shown photos of loved ones reported less pain.

Sleep more, live longer



Increase your shut-eye – and live to 100!

The secret to living to an old age could be linked to getting plenty of sleep! A study carried out in China asked 3000 people aged 100 or more to rate how well they slept and for how long.

It found the centenarians were much more likely than younger age groups to

sleep 10 hours or more a night. They also reported a good quality of sleep.

Dr Charli Sargent, from the Centre for Sleep Research, says it's important to have good 'sleep hygiene', such as comfortable bedding and a dark room to get a good night's sleep. It's also wise to have a nightly wind-down routine before hitting the hay.

If you only do one thing this week

EAT A HANDFUL OF NUTS

A Harvard University study of 30,000 teens has shown eating about two handfuls of nuts a week lowers the risk of benign breast disease (BBD) – a marker of breast cancer risk.



HOW TO BENT KICK-CROSSES

Try this easy-to-do exercise at home to help tone up your derriere

- 1 Get down on your hands and knees, with your knees placed directly underneath your hips. Raise one leg several centimetres off the floor and bend it at about a 90-degree angle from the floor.
- 2 Raise your leg up and back, forcing your heel to the ceiling – don't let your thigh go beyond a position parallel to the floor. Feel your glutes contract as you push up – for extra toning, squeeze harder.
- 3 Hold this position for a few seconds. Keeping your leg at a 90-degree angle from the floor, slowly lower your leg back to the starting position and repeat 10 times. Repeat with the other leg.

Top 3 fitness sites to click on...

Need some extra motivation or tools to get you exercising? Here are our top website picks that will get you moving...

WWW.DIET-BLOGG.COM This practical website is loaded with great ideas on how to bust your workout boredom. Just type exercise in the search field.

WWW.FITBOTTOMEDGIRLS.COM This website features multiple daily posts with fresh fitness content for real women and girls interested in physical activity and sensible eating.

WWW.MAPMYRUN.COM A handy tool for the beginner to advanced runner (or even walker), this website allows you to map your next route and find out how far you'll go. It also lists running events around the world.



By Vera Deval, Illustrations: Wendy Blume