How to Avoid Lupus Weight Gain

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Managing Your Weight While Avoiding Lupus Weight Gain

In the western world weight management can be difficult — with or without lupus. Increasingly, we live in a sedentary society with very little exercise, particularly those who drive to work at a desk job.

Many people, particularly those who live alone or in a two-earner household, don't have the time or money to create home-cooked, healthy meals, which leads to an increase in turning to processed foods for a quick and easy solution.

Gaining weight and lupus can, unfortunately, go hand in hand. This is particularly true in a flare-up when you're taking steroids (which can increase your appetite and make you retain fluid) or just being sedentary due to needing to continually rest.

While it is normal to gain a few pounds due to these factors during a flare, you should ensure your lupus weight gain doesn't get out of control.

There are many ways you can manage your weight when you have lupus, but personally, there are a few ways I've found that have helped me.

Consult Your Doctor

Firstly, before you begin any diet, exercise, or nutrition regime, consult your doctor.

They will be able to give you a baseline for your health and help you figure out what it is your diet is lacking or what you are getting too much of. This way, you can begin a plan to start eating in a healthier way.

Your doctor can also give you a reality check on what a healthy weight is (if you're too heavy or you're suffering from body image issues and imagine yourself heavier than you are) so you know how many calories per day you should be eating.

Analyze the Amount of Food You Eat

Some doctors will say increased hunger when taking steroids is all in your mind, but many lupus patients will tell you differently. This can be anything from increased cravings to actually eating much more food than you normally would.

Recognizing this, it is important to prepare for going on steroids by purchasing healthier food you can snack on during the day.

Instead of reaching for things like potato chips or cookies, try substituting your snacks for things like dried

cranberries, fruits, vegetables, rice cakes and other lower-calorie goodies.

You can also buy your favorite splurge items in smaller pre-packed containers. For example, instead of buying a whole package of Oreos and chomping down on them (realizing later you've eaten half of your daily calorie allotment in one sitting), purchase packages of them that contain two to four cookies.

Another way you can feel satiated more easily is to eat more low-calorie meals throughout the day instead of two to three big meals and snacks in between. Try going for things like fresh chicken salads and hearty soups three or four times a day to make sure that your stomach feels full.

Although some people find it maddening, it is a good idea to weigh out food to ensure you aren't accidentally eating more than you intended to. This will also minimize frustration later if you can't understand why you're gaining weight — and the real reason lies with the fact you are constantly eating more than you think you are.

Healthier Eating

When I have to be sedentary due to lupus (which I have been most of the year due to chronic appendicitis and two surgeries), I find eating healthy foods for lupus is key. It can also keep you feeling a little bit more energetic and less sluggish.

When I was younger and only worried about calorie counts, I would eat to my calorie limit with junk food and foods loaded with sugar and other ingredients that aren't good for you. This allows you to control your weight, but it increases your sluggish feelings and, if you have body image issues, might also increase feelings of shame.

Additionally, if you load up on processed foods, you may actually be eating fewer foods in the day because you're eating all of your calories at once, which leads to ultimately feeling less satisfied and perhaps feeling hungrier later.

Slow Down on the Sugar

Another added source of empty calories, and often an addiction in itself, is refined sugar. Sugar is definitely something your body needs in moderation, but it can be garnered from fruits and other natural sources.

Of course, this doesn't mean going full out and never eating anything sweet again, but cutting down on it can help curb the weight gain.

Next page: tracking your food intake, exercise, and more tips for avoiding lupus weight gain.

Slow Down on the Sugar

If you're experiencing a flare and find yourself gravitating toward comfort foods laden with sugar (which is totally normal, by the way!), try going off sugar for a week and see what happens.

Experimenting with only eating natural sugar can help reduce your cravings in the long run. While it may be difficult at first, and seem impossible in the first couple of days, your body will eventually reboot and stop craving it so intensely.

After your sugar detox, you'll likely find yourself not reaching for the sugary goodies so often, and thus making it easier to keep the weight off during your period of inactivity.

Tracking Your Food Intake

One way I like to ensure I am eating healthily is by using free eating tracking apps like MyFitnessPal. Many of

these apps allow you not only to see your daily calorie count, but also your daily intake of things like sugar, protein, sugar and sodium to ensure you're getting enough of all of the important nutrients you need in the day.

If you're used to leading an active lifestyle, and therefore used to eating a large amount of food, an app like this is particularly useful. Simply input your height and weight and the app will tell you how many calories a day you need to maintain your current weight.

Although everyone is different, I find a mixture of carbohydrates (found in breads and pastas) and proteins (found in meats, cheeses, beans, eggs, lentils and nuts) are the best in helping curbing hunger and increasing energy levels — two things that are necessary in order to maintain a healthy weight with lupus.

However, you may need to experiment to see what works best for you when it comes to helping keep your appetite under control.

Exercise

Lastly, exercising with lupus is very important. During a flare this may likely be impossible, so don't beat yourself up if you're unable to do more than feed yourself and shower in a day.

However, when you are feeling up to it, try and get in some low-impact exercise like simply walking around the block or even around the house.

Make it a goal to do simple weight-bearing exercises every day to keep your weight down and your bones and joints healthy. If you can, join a gym and swim some laps or bike on the stationary bike.

Listen to your body and make the effort to keep moving if it is possible. The ripple effects are a bit more energy and entering onto a path of better overall health that may help you during the next big battle with lupus.

Other Lupus Weight Gain Tips

- **Don't diet, just eat healthy:** Don't think of it as a diet, because it could make you want to eat more! Simply eat healthy foods and plenty of them. Create large healthy meals with mostly veggies filling your plate.
- **Imagine your dinner plate like a clock:** 45 minutes is veggies while only 15 is a lean meat. I try and eat plenty of cucumbers, cauliflower and broccoli and stay clear of heavy salad dressing, cheese or butter.
- **Chew slowly and savor meals:** Eating on the run takes away that much-needed savoring of food, which I find makes me want eat again. There is something about sitting down to dinner that is part of the overall feeling of being satisfied by what you ate.
- **Choose only healthy types of take-out:** In the midst of a lupus flare, take-out may be my go-to option to get dinner on the table. Make it healthy food, like a grilled chicken salad (vinaigrette on the side), not fast food or soda.
- **Allow yourself small snacks:** Yes, snacking can be our pitfall in controlling weight, but not if you put together baggies of healthy snacks that make the portion and snack choice quick and easy to stick to.
- **Drink lots of water:** The more water you drink (I put lemon in mine to add to the anti-inflammatory effect) the more you flush out your body and also create a sensation of fullness to curb that increased appetite. Cold water is said to also work better at curbing the appetite.

Don't Let It Get You Down

Many times you will gain weight during a lupus flare simply because of water retention, despite all of your best efforts. This can feel infuriating and make you feel out of control of your body.

Remind yourself during these times that lupus is only a part of you and doesn't represent who you are as a whole. You are so much more than your illness or any temporary water weight you gain!