Avoiding Weight Gain During Cancer Treatment
Patient Education

Weight gain is often a concern with certain patients. Certain hormones, medications, lack of activity or certain types of chemotherapy may predispose one to gaining weight. Some of the candidates include women with breast cancer and males on hormonal treatment. Appetite may be increased and fluid retention may occur.

What can I do to avoid weight gain?
Understand the effects of the medications that you are taking. Talk to your doctor about the chances of possible weight gain. A low fat, calorie controlled diet is generally recommended. Some general tips include:

- Awareness and acceptance of the fact that you will be hungrier.
- Drink more low calorie fluids such as sparkling water, herbal teas or low sugar beverages.
- Emphasize fruits, vegetables, as well as whole-grain breads and cereals.
- Eat lean meats and chicken without the skin. Most fish is naturally low in fat.
- Use low-fat dairy products (skim milk, fat free yogurt).
- Choose low-fat cooking methods, such as broiling, braising, and steaming.
- Avoid snacking on high-calorie foods. Choose fruits and vegetables, which are high in fiber and have no fat.
- Read food labels and compare different products.
- Do not add fat, salt, or sugar to your food.
- If you feel well enough, include some exercise to help maintain muscle.

Be good to yourself during this time by setting realistic goals in light of your treatment program.

What if I notice a significant weight gain?
Inform your doctor or medical team so that you can find out what is causing the change. Sometimes the drugs you are taking cause your body to hold excess fluid, which may cause weight gain. In such cases, you may be advised to reduce your salt intake and to take a diuretic to help your body get rid of the water.

Adapted from Oncolink Website 2001
E. Connor, RD, CSO 2010