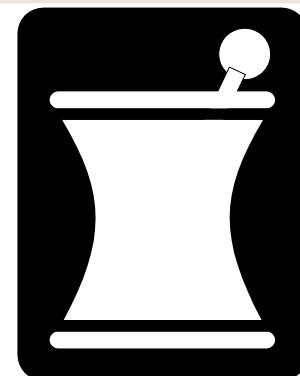


# Weight gain and Metformin

Patient information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

Healthinfo.org.nz

Some medications may cause people to gain weight, develop diabetes (high blood glucose) and increase blood fats (known as lipids and cholesterol). These problems can have serious effects on your health. This leaflet aims to tell you how you, together with your health professional, (e.g. doctor, nurse, case manager), can work together to reduce the risk of this happening, and how your health will be monitored.



The doctor will also discuss with you whether there are any other side-effects that might occur with the medication you are prescribed.

## What causes weight gain?

Weight gain happens when you consume more calories than you use up as energy.

Certain types of food contain high levels of calories, and the more food one eats the higher the amount of calories taken in by the body.

Increasing your physical activity uses up more calories.

## How does weight gain happen?

Some antipsychotic medications cause an increase in appetite. Most weight gain happens in the first six weeks of treatment. If this can be prevented, it is easier than trying to lose the weight at a later stage.

Either because of the illness itself, or due to side-effects of medication, some people may have less energy and are less active than usual, making it harder to burn off excess calories.

Any increase in blood lipids often occurs as a result of increase in weight.

## What are the causes of diabetes?

Some people may develop diabetes. This is a condition in which your body does not handle glucose (sugars) as well as it should, causing high blood levels of glucose. It is due to both weight gain and increased difficulties in metabolising glucose by muscles. Your doctor can monitor for early signs of this problem.

## Why worry about these problems?

Together these side effects can cause a person to have an increase risk of developing heart disease (angina and heart attacks).

Diabetes also has its own complications including an increase risk of developing problems with your eyes, kidneys and nerve damage to your feet.

## **What are the early signs that there might be a problem with diabetes?**

Early warning signs are thirst and a need to pass increased amounts of urine. Signs of more serious high levels of glucose in the body (ketoacidosis) may rarely develop in some people. These signs may include vomiting and stomach pain, or drowsiness. Most often these things will be due to something else (such as stomach bug or the flu) but it is important that you are checked out, as ketoacidosis needs to be treated urgently in hospital. You should see a doctor or nurse if you develop these problems.

## **How will my physical condition be monitored?**

The doctor will measure your height, weight and waist circumference, and take your blood pressure regularly. Blood tests will also need to be done at regular intervals to monitor blood glucose and lipid levels in your body. The doctor will discuss the details of these blood tests with you.

We recommend that you weigh yourself every two weeks to monitor your weight.

## **Are there things that I can do?**

It is important that you eat as healthily as you can (avoid soft drinks and junk food in particular) and that you increase the amount of exercise you do. Your doctor, nurse or case manager can give you more information on diet and about other resources that may be helpful.

## **Can I see a dietitian?**

Yes, if you would like to see a dietitian, please ask your doctor, nurse or case manager to make a referral.

## **Should I stop my antipsychotic medication if I am concerned?**

No. There can be problems with stopping medication suddenly. You should discuss your

concerns with your doctor who will consider a number of ways to deal with the concerns you have identified.

## **What about Metformin?**

Metformin can be helpful to reduce weight if you have already put it on. It can also be helpful for keeping the weight off, if you are thought to be at a high risk of gaining weight when you start an antipsychotic.

## **How long should I take Metformin for?**

If you start metformin at the same time as an antipsychotic, you may only need to take it for the first six to eight weeks of treatment.

If the metformin is working for you, it may be prescribed for a longer period.

Metformin will start to make a difference after a week and continue to make a difference longer term.

## **How do I take Metformin?**

You will be started on a small dose with your main meal. This will be slowly increased to one tablet with breakfast, lunch and dinner. It is best taken with food to minimise it upsetting your stomach.

Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some effects of medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet, you may find a lot of information there as well, but be careful as internet based information is not always accurate.

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