

Healthy Weight

How Could I be Underweight?

Over the years, you probably worked hard to keep the pounds off. Now, your doctor says you need to gain weight? How can that be? There are many reasons you might be underweight, including:

- Loss of muscle-mass associated with aging
- Decreased eating due to difficulty swallowing
- Denture problems that interfere with chewing
- Age-related depression that diminishes appetite
- Grief or stress that decreases interest in pleasurable activities like eating
- Medication side-effects that suppress appetite
- Illnesses like diabetes, COPD, & hyperthyroidism
- Difficulty eating full meals due to GI problems

Is it Really a Problem if I'm Underweight?

Yes. Low body-mass is a serious health problem that requires attention. It afflicts about 17% of senior citizens, and it is associated with many health and quality-of-life problems, including:

- Increased risk of osteoporosis and bone fractures
- Difficulty walking & impaired balance
- Loss of muscle, including cardiac tissue
- Chronic fatigue
- Compromised immune system & greater risk of infectious disease
- Hair loss or thinning
- Poor concentration and memory
- Premature death

How Can I Gain Weight?

Gaining weight can be more challenging than you might expect, but it's definitely worth the effort. Talk with your Physician to decide if these strategies might help you:

- Exercise a little to stimulate your appetite
- Make meals a social occasion by eating with friends in the dining room
- Supplement meals with a nutrition drink like Ensure
- Drink whole milk instead of skim milk
- Select cream-based soups rather than those made from broth
- Add some healthy, calorie-dense items to your diet, including natural peanut butter, avacados, olive oil, yogurt, cheese & pasta
- Occasionally indulge in treats like ice cream
- Don't skip breakfast. Instead, have some oatmeal or a carbohydrate-rich food like waffles
- Eat four or five small meals each day instead of trying to get all your calories from just three meals
- Replace water with juices
- Talk with a Registered Dietitian about strategies for increasing to a healthy weight
- Talk with your Physician about antidepressant medications or other options to stimulate your appetite

Additional Resources

- **EatRight:** <https://www.eatright.org/health/weight-loss/your-health-and-your-weight/healthy-weight-gain>
- **Nutritionist-Resource:** <https://www.nutritionist-resource.org.uk/articles/weight-gain.html>
- **HealthLine:** <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/how-to-gain-weight>
- **WebMD:** <https://www.webmd.com/diet/features/how-to-gain-weight#1>