



# Preventing Unwanted Weight Loss

**Weight loss becomes a major concern when you have the involuntary loss of more than 10% of your normal body weight within 12 months, or 7.5% within 6 months.** When you are sick, it's common to lose a little weight and then to gain it back once you have gotten over your illness. However, you may not always be able to gain back what you lost. This can lead to a gradual decline in your weight if you are sick very often. This accidental, rapid weight loss has been linked with an increased risk of death, faster disease progression, loss of muscle mass, and a reduction of strength and ability to function. It's important to seek help at the first sign of weight loss to minimize the amount of weight you lose and help gain the weight back before it can become a major concern.

The first step in treating involuntary weight loss is to identify any medical causes. Your medical provider can do this. In addition to medical causes, there are many things that can cause weight loss, the most common being loss of appetite. Other causes of involuntary weight loss are:

- Eating problems due to a sore mouth or throat
- Infections (make the body use up more energy)
- Difficulties accessing, shopping and/or preparing food
- Chronic diarrhea or nausea/vomiting

The second step is to contact our dietitian who can analyze what you are currently eating and help you to create a personalized weight gain plan. Regardless of the cause, if you use more energy than you take in, you will lose weight. To start taking in more energy, keep in mind the tips below to power pack the foods that you eat. Ask us about Chicken Soup Brigade – Lifelong's Food Program and other food resources in your area if you are having a hard time getting enough food.

- ✓ Do what works best for you. Decide if bigger meals, more snacks, or both are your best bet for eating more.
- ✓ Adequate protein is very important if you are below your healthy weight and have a difficult time maintaining muscle mass.
- ✓ Eat or drink several rich sources of protein each day such as meats, beans, dairy products, eggs, soy products, quinoa, and nuts. See our dietitian to help you identify rich sources of protein to add to your diet.
- ✓ Once you have stopped losing weight, avoid foods high in saturated fat like fried foods, pastries, fatty meats (red meat), and full-fat dairy products. They make you feel full more quickly and may reduce your appetite for other more nutritious foods. Plus, eating foods high in saturated fat are NOT healthy for your heart!

Exercise is a necessary component of any healthy weight gain plan. Exercise builds muscle, promotes cardiovascular health, and can improve immune system function, plus it can help with mental well being, fatigue, sleep patterns, and digestive health. Exercise doesn't have to be at a gym – there is plenty you can do right in your home! Ask our dietitian or your medical provider for safe exercises that can help you reach your weight goal. If you can afford to go to a gym, seek out a personal trainer that can help you create a safe and personalized work out. Remember, when it comes to muscle mass, you must use it or you will lose it!

In situations where standard dietary and medical treatments are not enough, additional medications may be prescribed. The most common are forms are testosterone or growth hormone. Both have benefits and drawbacks that should be seriously considered before starting treatment, and they may not be safe for some people to take. Ask your medical provider or dietitian for more information about these and other treatments.

*To schedule a FREE visit with a Chicken Soup Brigade dietitian, call (206) 957-1600*