

Level 1

Weight Loss after Starting a Gluten-Free Diet

Key Points:

- Some patients continue to lose weight or have trouble maintaining their weight even after starting a gluten-free diet.
- It is important to identify the reason for the continued weight loss while using the tips below to gain weight.

Possible Reasons for Continued Weight Loss/Difficulty Gaining Weight:

1. Cross contamination: Intentional or unintentional gluten exposure causing persistent malabsorption

2. Inadequate intake of calories: It can be difficult to navigate the gluten-free diet and learn what is “safe to eat.”

3. Consuming a healthier diet: By not dining out as often and choosing naturally gluten-free foods, such as fruits and vegetables, daily caloric intake may be lower than before.

4. An undiagnosed medical condition: This may cause weight loss or poor appetite. Some possibilities include:

- Hyperthyroidism
- Microscopic colitis
- Small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (see “Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth” on Celiacnow.org)
- Pancreatic insufficiency
- Vitamin deficiencies
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Cancer (very rare)

5. You have other food sensitivities/intolerances: Fructose and lactose are common culprits.

Tips to Aid Weight Gain

1. Determine the reason for your continued weight loss. The solution will depend on the cause.
2. If weight loss is due to cross-contamination with gluten, work with a dietitian who understands the gluten-free diet and cross-contamination.
3. If you think you may have a medical reason for your continued weight loss, please consult your doctor.
4. If you think a food sensitivity or intolerance may be your issue, consult a doctor or dietitian familiar with food intolerances.
5. Set a healthy weight gain goal with your doctor or dietitian.

Tips to increase your daily caloric intake:

- Add 2 Tablespoons of oil per day to your diet. Start with less, if necessary, to allow your gut to adjust. Try MCT oil-(medium chain triglycerides), such as organic coconut oil. This is a form of predigested fat and is more readily absorbed. Add it to salads or shakes; sauté vegetables in it or add it to rice. You can also take it by itself. Once your digestion has improved, you can switch to olive oil if additional calories are still needed.
- Increase your intake of plain nuts, seeds, and nut butters (almond butter, cashew butter, peanut butter).
- Add protein powder (labeled gluten-free) to cereal, milk, non-dairy milk alternatives (gluten-free almond, rice or soy milk) or shakes.
- Learn to love avocados; they are a great source of healthy fats and calories.
- If you can tolerate dairy, use full fat yogurt, cheese, and milk. You can add yogurt and milk to your smoothies for additional calories.
- Eat small, frequent meals to allow your body to optimize digestion and regulate blood sugar.

Please note: if you have ongoing diarrhea it is best to use non-dairy food sources to increase your calories.

TAKE HOME MESSAGES:

1. Weight loss can occur, or continue, for some people after starting a gluten-free diet.
2. The long term solution to keeping a healthy weight is finding the cause of the weight loss.
3. If weight loss is a concern, please consult your doctor/dietitian for help.

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