



What makes us fat?

There are lots of things that can contribute to putting on weight or make it hard to slim down. In my years of Personal Training I have encountered the same issues many times. Here are my top ten causes and what to do about them.

1. Eating too much! The most obvious, yet still the one most people tend to be in denial over! The easiest ways to reduce what you eat are to use a smaller plate, replace half your meal with extra vegetables and cut out unhealthy snacks. Most people either eat too much, or more commonly don't realise that some of their favourite foods are actually very calorific. Mistakes such as eating too many carbs or eating foods high in saturated fats are easy to make and can be done completely unknowingly.
2. Drinking too much. Usually alcohol, but also sugary drinks like Coca-Cola. Did you know the average person will have to run for nearly two hours to burn off the calories in a bottle of wine? I have seen clients shed pounds very quickly just by drinking half their usual weekly alcohol amount.
3. Stress. Being stressed causes the body to store fat, as well as having many other serious health effects. Therefore dealing with stress is essential. Stress also has indirect effects such as making you less inclined to exercise or to comfort eat and drink more. It can also lead to...
4. Too little sleep. Studies have shown that people who sleep six hours per night or fewer are likely to be more overweight than contemporaries who sleep eight hours or more.
5. Getting older. After the age of thirty our bodies are slowly dying. Depressing isn't it? Our metabolism slows down, cells regenerate less effectively and we need fewer calories. Unless we are actively trying to be more active we will find the same diet we ate in our twenties will be more than we need after thirty, so we'll gain weight.
6. Losing muscle. This is linked to getting older, but can strike at any time if you change the way you train. If you drop regular weight training to do more aerobic exercise you may find you need fewer calories. Conversely, adding weight training to your workout will help you lose weight more quickly than aerobic exercise alone.
7. Becoming less active. Do you spend more time at work? More time sat at a desk? More time sat in front of the TV because you feel tired? More time playing computer games? Drive places you used to walk or cycle to? It can creep up on you and suddenly you find you are less active as you get older.
8. Crash dieting. Dieting makes you fat! Especially fad diets that involve only eating one food type or drinking lots of shakes. They work in the short-term because you eat far fewer calories, but as soon as you eat normally again you gain all the weight lost and a bit more. The key is not to 'diet' but to learn to eat healthily in a way that can be sustained in the long-term.

9. Using the wrong scales. Not bathroom scales, but the wrong way to assess whether you have too much fat. According to weighing scales or the BMI measurement, Jonny Wilkinson is obese. The phrase 'big boned' is often used jokingly, but some people can be heavier on scales without actually being unhealthy. The best way to assess whether you have unhealthy weight or fat to lose is to use a variety of measures, including an actual measurement of fat to assess whether the weight on the scales is unhealthy fat, or healthy muscle or bone.
10. Metabolism. Only if you have exhausted all of the issues above is it worth checking there is not an underlying medical issue, such as an underactive thyroid, making weight loss difficult. People often use a slow metabolism as an excuse for weight gain and whilst all metabolisms are different, usually the solution is actually easier to reach and less difficult to overcome.