

The COVID 19 Pandemic and Weight Gain

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During this COVID-19 pandemic, we have learned a lot about ourselves. From a preventative health and weight loss perspective, what interests me the most are the health consequences.

I noticed several patterns early on:

Many people started drinking more to cope, eventually realizing that this was not a good idea and cut back. Unfortunately, a few people are still drinking way more alcohol than is healthy. Alcohol in moderation can be safe, but in larger quantities substantially increases heart disease and cancer risk.

Most people who used to have to eat out a lot (entertaining clients) or travel a lot for business initially lost weight when eating smaller portion sizes at home. I know of one individual that lost more than 40 pounds over the course of one year.

Most people who used to have a routine in their lives such as going to the office and coming home at a certain time and going to a gym ended up gaining weight during the pandemic as they gained constant access to food at home and a much lower activity level. The average weight gain I've seen is in the 10-15 pound range.

I find this third trend the most fascinating. Most people who are working from home have realized that this is not a healthy lifestyle. When they were going into an office they were getting 3,000-5,000 steps a day in the suburbs and 5,000-8,000 steps a day in a city like Toronto. Now at home, they are often only getting 1,000-2,000 steps a day. The pandemic has made sitting disease so much worse.

Fortunately, many people have also started to go for walks to compensate. I've heard great stories of families bonding while walking together outdoors. With vaccination rates up, some people are comfortable heading back to the gym, others have been fortunate enough to find home exercise equipment while others are becoming creative and doing bodyweight exercises at home.

While these forms of activity can be great for mental as well as physical health and can help prevent more weight gain, they won't usually help decrease body weight. For that, many people are realizing that we need to change how we eat.

Minimizing processed food intake, having cut-up fruits and vegetables ready to munch on, and finding something else to do when bored or stressed are some of the keys to losing weight. So is meal planning and minimizing the number of times food is ordered from restaurants, especially from fast food establishments.