

WHY THE SUDDEN WEIGHT GAIN?

A little weight gain over a few months can be due to those extra snacks but when it's accelerated in a short span of time, something more insidious could be at play. **Dr Shamita Sharma**, a consultant endocrinologist at Subang Jaya Medical Centre highlights the connection between endocrine disorders and obesity, and why it's important to get them treated.

According to the World Population Review 2019, Malaysia has the highest prevalence of obesity among adults in Southeast Asia at 15.6 per cent. Meanwhile, the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2019 findings showed that 50.1 per cent of adults in Malaysia were either overweight or obese—30.4 per cent were overweight and 19.7 per cent obese.

Most cases of obesity are due to a positive energy balance. What this means is that a person's caloric intake exceeds what they burn off. However there are some cases of obesity that are caused by a hormonal imbalance triggered by underlying endocrine issues.

The endocrine system is a

system of glands that is distributed throughout the body. These glands produce hormones which act on different parts of the body and carry out certain functions such as metabolism, digestion, bone maintenance, growth, reproduction, temperature regulation, and many more.

ENDOCRINE DISORDERS

Not known to many is that diabetes is also an endocrine disorder and it is by far the most common endocrine disorder. However in diabetes the scenario is reversed, where it does not cause obesity but instead obesity leads to diabetes.

The more common endocrine diseases

associated with weight gain are hypothyroidism, which is caused by an underactive thyroid gland and polycystic ovarian syndrome which occurs exclusively in women. Then there is hypogonadism or sex hormone deficiency. This can lead to weight gain especially in men, where it results in reduced muscle mass and increased adiposity. A less common endocrine disorder causing weight gain is Cushing's Syndrome, which is due to an excess of steroid in the body," explains Dr Shamita.

How does one end up with excess steroid in their system?

"In our country, we see it largely in patients who take traditional medications without knowing that these medications contain high levels of steroids. This causes patients to develop significant weight gain and change in their appearance. This change in appearance happens over the years, resulting in a round, moon

face, increase in facial hair for women, abdominal obesity, and even increase in bone fractures," says Dr Shamita.

When coming off traditional medication, it's important to do so slowly and gradually



Dr Shamita Sharma



pregnancy or chances of getting pregnant," Dr. Shamita highlights.

GETTING TREATMENT

It is important not to brush off any type of sudden weight gain. If the obesity is due to an underlying endocrine issue, the disorder itself can lead to more negative outcomes apart from just obesity. For example, when hypothyroidism is left untreated for too long, it can lead to myxoedema coma. Meanwhile, untreated Cushing's Syndrome leads to reduced lifespan and other complications like diabetes, hypertension, and osteoporosis.

And of course, obesity itself can be very damaging, causing diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, knee problems from weight bearing, sleep apnoea from interruption of the breathing when sleeping, and gastroesophageal reflux disease.

"Although getting yourself treated for endocrine diseases will help reduce some weight, it is still important to make lifestyle modifications to lose more of the weight that may have been gained. It is often said that weight loss is about 70 per cent diet and 30 per cent exercise, and there is truth in this. While exercise keeps you motivated, helps burn calories, and increases your resting metabolic rate, diet is still the most crucial component of weight loss," advises Dr Shamita. ©

under medical supervision so as to not cause fainting episodes due to a sudden lack of the energy-producing hormone cortisol. It will take a while for the body to increase its cortisol levels naturally, while in some cases the hormone levels may never recover.

WATCH OUT FOR THE SYMPTOMS

There are some specific symptoms to look out for if you are wondering if your weight gain is endocrine-related. For example, in hypothyroidism you will experience a change in voice, menstrual disturbances, dry skin, cold intolerance, constipation, and sometimes constant fatigue. In Cushing's Syndrome the weight gain may occur very rapidly rather

than creeping up on you. Endocrine issues should also be suspected in patients who have undergone radiation therapy, as its side effects include compromised glands.

"Weight gain due to endocrine disorders has been found to affect more women than men as there are more endocrine conditions that affect women. Thyroid diseases are more common in women than men by four to five times while there is no male equivalent of the polycystic ovarian syndrome, which usually presents with menstrual disturbances and infertility. Endocrine issues in younger women need to be paid close attention to because if they are undetected and untreated, they may cause implications to a

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