SYMPTOM

Increased appetite

Increased appetite means feeling hungry more often or needing more food than usual.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Feeling hungry more often or needing more food to feel full

WHERE IT IS FELT
Stomach and whole-body sense of hunger

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Increased activity, skipped meals, poor sleep

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Hunger with vomiting, deep breathing, drowsiness, or confusion

USUALLY LASTS
Based on activity, health changes, medicines, and eating patterns

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Persistent hunger, weight change, or thirst and frequent urination

Overview

Increased appetite means feeling hungrier than usual, eating more than usual, or having trouble feeling satisfied after meals. It is a symptom rather than a disease.

Appetite can change for everyday reasons. You may need more food during periods of increased physical activity, growth, pregnancy, breastfeeding, or recovery from illness. Missed meals, poor sleep, stress, and changes in your normal routine can also affect hunger.

Sometimes an ongoing increase in appetite is related to a medicine or health condition. The pattern matters. For example, increased hunger alongside weight loss, excessive thirst, or frequent urination needs medical review.

What it may feel or look like

You may notice hunger returning soon after eating. Portions that once felt satisfying may no longer feel like enough. You might snack more often, wake feeling hungry, or think about food more than usual.

Other symptoms can help point toward a cause. Notice whether increased appetite occurs

with:

Appetite is not the same as a craving. Hunger is a general drive to eat, while a craving is usually a strong desire for a particular food. Both can occur together.

- Unplanned weight gain or weight loss
- Increased thirst or urination
- Shaking, sweating, weakness, or dizziness
- Feeling unusually hot, anxious, or restless
- A racing or pounding heartbeat
- Changes in sleep, mood, activity, or menstrual periods
- Episodes of eating quickly or feeling unable to stop

Common causes

Your body may naturally ask for more energy after increased exercise, physical work, missed meals, or an illness that reduced your food intake. Children and teenagers may eat more during periods of growth. Pregnancy and breastfeeding can also change appetite.

Meals that are small or not very filling may allow hunger to return quickly. Fibre, protein, and fat generally take longer to digest than refined carbohydrates alone. Poor sleep may also affect the body signals involved in hunger and fullness.

Stress, low mood, boredom, and changes in routine can alter eating patterns. Some people eat more when distressed, while others lose their appetite.

Medicines can increase hunger. Examples include corticosteroids and some medicines used for allergies, mood conditions, or psychosis. Do not stop a prescribed medicine on your own. A prescriber or pharmacist can check whether appetite change is a known effect and discuss possible options.

Less commonly, persistent hunger can be linked to a health condition. Diabetes may cause increased hunger because the body cannot use glucose, its main blood sugar, normally. It may also cause thirst, frequent urination, tiredness, blurred vision, or unplanned weight loss.

An overactive thyroid can speed up the body's processes. Possible signs include increased appetite despite weight loss, heat intolerance, sweating, trembling, frequent bowel movements, and a fast heartbeat.

Low blood glucose can cause sudden hunger, shaking, sweating, weakness, dizziness, or confusion. It is most common in people taking insulin or certain other diabetes medicines,

although other causes are possible.

Repeated episodes of eating a large amount with a sense of losing control may be part of an eating disorder. This is different from simply having a strong appetite and deserves supportive, non-judgmental care.

When to seek medical care

Book a routine appointment if increased appetite lasts for several weeks, has no clear explanation, or is causing unwanted weight change. Arrange an earlier review if it comes with persistent tiredness, tremor, heat intolerance, a fast heartbeat, or changes in bowel habits.

Seek same-day medical advice if increased hunger occurs with marked thirst, frequent urination, and unplanned weight loss. This is especially important for a child or teenager, during pregnancy, or if you already have diabetes.

Sudden hunger with shaking, sweating, dizziness, or confusion may be low blood glucose. If you have diabetes, follow your personal low-glucose plan and recheck as instructed. Get urgent help if symptoms do not improve or you cannot safely eat or drink.

Call emergency services for vomiting, stomach pain, deep or rapid breathing, severe drowsiness, confusion, a seizure, or loss of consciousness. These symptoms can occur with dangerously abnormal blood glucose or another serious problem.

How the cause is found

A healthcare professional will ask when the change began and whether your weight, thirst, urination, sleep, mood, or activity has changed. They may ask what you eat, whether hunger occurs at particular times, and whether you ever feel unable to control your eating.

Bring a list of prescription medicines, over-the-counter products, and supplements. Mention recent dose changes, even if they seem unrelated.

An examination may include your weight, pulse, blood pressure, and signs of thyroid or blood glucose problems. Depending on your symptoms, blood tests may check glucose levels or thyroid function. Not everyone needs testing.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the cause. A medicine-related appetite change may improve after a

carefully supervised adjustment. Diabetes, thyroid disease, low blood glucose, and eating disorders each require different care.

While arranging routine review, it may help to:

Avoid severe food restriction to compensate for hunger. It can make hunger more intense and may lead to cycles of overeating. If access to enough food is difficult, tell a healthcare or community support professional; practical support is part of addressing the symptom.

Do not change diabetes treatment, thyroid medicine, steroids like prednisone or hydrocortisone , or psychiatric medicine without professional advice.

- Eat regular meals rather than repeatedly skipping meals
- Include protein and fibre-rich foods that help meals feel satisfying
- Drink enough water, especially during activity or hot weather
- Keep a consistent sleep schedule where possible
- Record hunger, meals, symptoms, medicines, and weight changes

What to expect

A short-lived increase related to exercise, missed meals, growth, or recovery may settle when your body's energy needs or routine return to normal.

If a medicine or health condition is involved, appetite often becomes easier to manage as the underlying issue is addressed. The timing will depend on the cause and treatment.

Follow up if symptoms continue, return repeatedly, or new symptoms appear. Changes in weight, thirst, urination, heartbeat, or energy can be useful clues and should be mentioned at your appointment.

Common questions

Can increased appetite be a sign of diabetes?

It can be, but many other explanations are possible. Hunger is more concerning for diabetes when it occurs with excessive thirst, frequent urination, tiredness, blurred vision, or unplanned weight loss.

Why am I hungry soon after eating?

The meal may have been small, or it may not have contained enough filling nutrients such as protein or fibre. Activity, sleep loss, medicines, stress, and medical conditions can also

contribute.

Does increased appetite always cause weight gain?

No. Weight depends on food intake, activity, metabolism, and health. Some conditions, including an overactive thyroid or uncontrolled diabetes, can cause increased hunger alongside weight loss.

Should I try to ignore the hunger?

Not necessarily. Hunger can be a normal signal that your body needs energy. Regular, balanced meals are usually more helpful than severe restriction. Persistent or unexplained hunger should be discussed with a healthcare professional.

Sources

- MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia: Appetite - increased , U.S. National Library of Medicine
- Symptoms and Causes of Diabetes , National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
- Low Blood Glucose (Hypoglycemia) , National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
- Hyperthyroidism (Overactive Thyroid) , National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
- Eating Disorders , National Institute of Mental Health
- Steroids , NHS