



Health IMMUNITY

# 6 Autoimmune Diseases That Mess With Your Weight

FEBRUARY 14, 2017 By KARA WAHLGREN



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**Autoimmune diseases** happen when your body's immune system starts attacking its own organs, tissues, and cells. **Although they're on the rise**, they're also tricky to diagnose. Symptoms can creep up slowly, and many of them—like achy joints, fatigue, and tummy troubles—overlap with other disorders.

But there's one symptom that many autoimmune diseases share: weight changes. "Almost everyone with an autoimmune disorder has it affect their

weight one way or the other," says Mark Engelman, MD, a [clinical consultant for Cyrex Laboratories](#), a clinical lab specializing in functional immunology.

So if the number on the scale suddenly goes up or down with no good explanation, take stock of whether you've experienced any other weird, nagging symptoms, and talk to your doctor if you think an autoimmune disease could be to blame. (Check out these [5 surprising conditions that cause weight gain](#).)

While Engelman notes that just about any autoimmune disease can affect your weight to some extent, here are a few of the most common culprits.



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## Type 1 diabetes

Of the 29 million [Americans who have diabetes](#), only around 1.25 million have type 1, which occurs when the immune system attacks the cells that [produce insulin in the pancreas](#). (Type 2 diabetes, the more common form, is not considered an autoimmune illness.) Because insulin plays a key role in how your body uses and stores glucose for energy, many people with undiagnosed type 1 diabetes experience unexplained weight loss. If you're having any other symptoms—like excessive thirst, frequent urination,

[fatigue](#), or blurred vision—talk to a doctor.



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## Rheumatoid arthritis

Weight gain isn't technically a symptom of [rheumatoid arthritis](#), but it's common for people with RA to see the number on the scale start creeping upward. The steroids commonly used to reduce inflammation can cause weight gain and water retention, and the symptoms—joint tenderness, stiffness, and fatigue—can make it hard to maintain your normal activity level. But Engelman says patients often get discouraged when they can't work out at "warrior" level and end up doing nothing at all. "Put your sneakers on, and [walk for 15 minutes or half an hour](#) at a reasonable pace," he says.

**Prevention Premium:** [9 Highly Effective Solutions For Fibromyalgia](#)



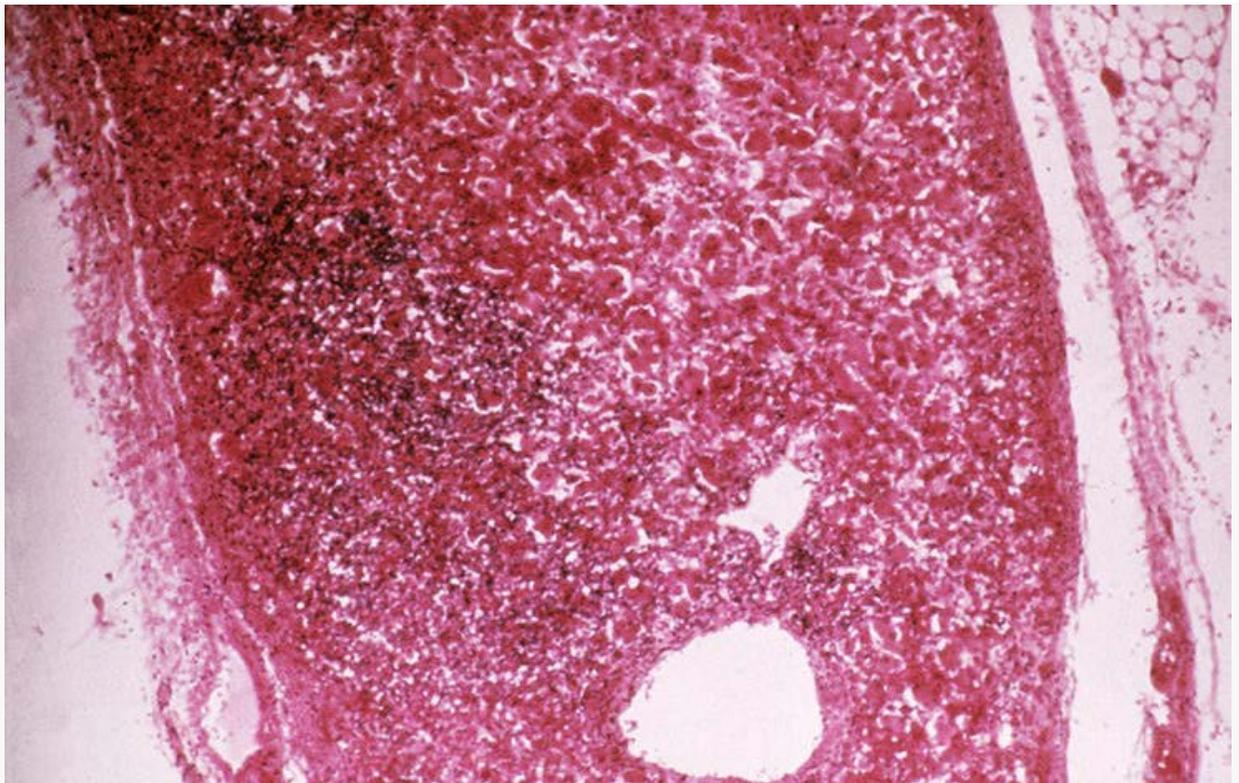


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## Celiac disease

We hear a lot about [gluten sensitivity](#) these days, but only around **1% of the population actually has celiac disease**, an autoimmune disorder in which eating gluten causes the immune system to attack the cells of the small intestine. People with [celiac](#) "don't absorb food well, so they're frequently thin," Engelman says. Other symptoms can vary greatly, but may include abdominal pain, bloating, headaches, joint pain, or anemia. Your doctor can do a simple blood test to screen for it—just be aware that you have to be consuming gluten for the screening to work properly, so call your doctor before attempting a DIY [elimination diet](#).



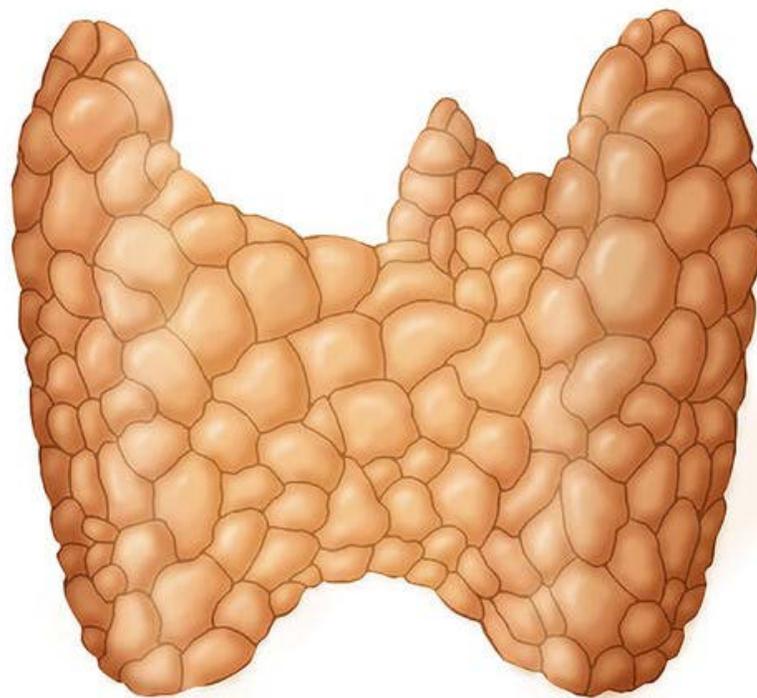


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## Addison's disease

This autoimmune disorder affects the adrenal glands, which regulate the hormones that help you cope with stress and regulate your blood pressure. When the adrenal glands don't produce enough of these hormones, it can cause decreased appetite, nausea, and sudden weight loss. If you've been exhausted or lightheaded lately, or your mood has been off, mention it to your doctor. (Here are [8 things you should know about Addison's disease.](#))





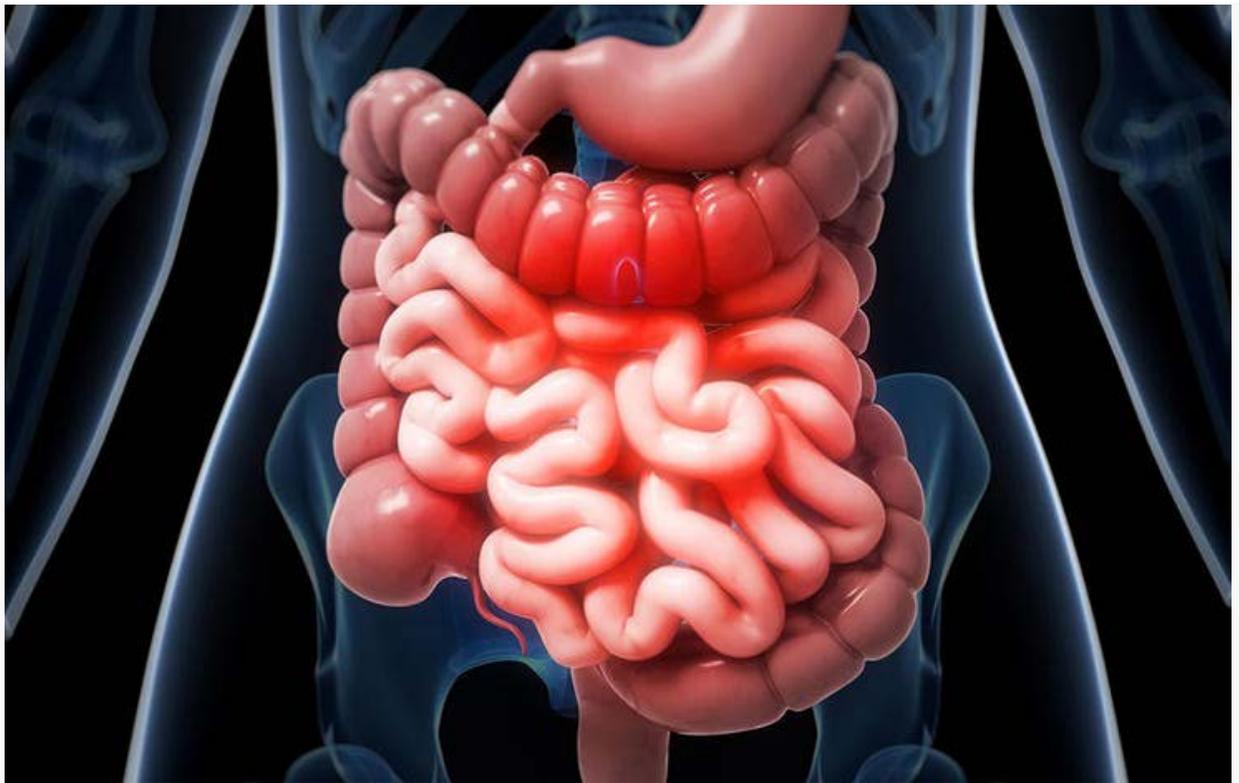
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## Thyroid disorders

When your immune system messes with your thyroid, it can cause unexplained weight changes. Your thyroid helps control your metabolism, so if it's underactive (hypothyroidism), everything slows down. That's why common symptoms include weight gain, fatigue, constipation, [hair loss](#), and depression.

The flip side is an overactive thyroid, which is often [caused by Graves' disease](#). When your thyroid makes too much thyroid hormone—you guessed it—everything speeds up, including your metabolism. "You lose weight even though you're eating like a lunatic," Engelman says. Other symptoms can include rapid heartbeat, frequent bowel movements, and difficulty sleeping. If you suspect [your thyroid might be out of whack](#), your doctor can check with a simple blood test. (In as little as 30 days, you can be a whole lot slimmer, way more energetic, and so much healthier just by following the simple, [groundbreaking plan in \*The Thyroid Cure!\*](#))





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## Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis

**Crohn's and colitis** tend to get lumped together, because both are inflammatory bowel diseases caused by an abnormal immune response. The difference: **ulcerative colitis** only affects the colon, whereas Crohn's can affect any part of the gastrointestinal tract. Both diseases can cause diarrhea and cramping, and since this can make eating pretty unpleasant, weight loss is also a common symptom. If you have ongoing tummy troubles, talk to your doctor.

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