

Over the last week, several media outlets in both [Canada](#) and the [United States](#) have reported some unsurprising news: the Covid-19 pandemic hasn't been very kind to our waistlines.

On average, one-third of Canadians gained five or more pounds since this time a year ago when sheltering-in-place began. By contrast, 61 percent of Americans gained between 20 and 50 pounds, while another 10 percent report gaining in excess of 50.

While both Canada and the U.S. reported weight gains as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, in truth, both Canadians and Americans have struggled with weight for years.

According to a survey conducted by the Canadian Community Healthy Survey (CCHS) and published by the [Public Library of Science](#) (PLOS), more than 60 percent of Canadians are considered overweight or even obese, as compared to [70 percent of Americans](#).

Inevitable consequences of this excess weight are chronic health issues such as hypertension (high blood pressure), high cholesterol and type 2 diabetes. Prevalence of all three (mostly) preventable diseases is high in both countries.

- Approximately one in four adult Canadians is [hypertensive](#) (140/90 or higher)
- Roughly 45 percent of adult Americans has [hypertension](#)
- Twenty-nine percent of Canadians live with type 2 diabetes
- Thirty-four million Americans have diagnosed diabetes (many go undiagnosed for years). [Over 90 percent of diabetics are type 2 diabetics](#).
- Data for cholesterol rates in Canada are very outdated (2010), with [47 percent of the population having high cholesterol](#)
- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that [18 percent of Americans](#) have high cholesterol

Managing Covid-19 Stress: Hitting the Trifecta

Whether due to personal circumstances, the pandemic or both, you may be one of the millions of Canadians or Americans who feel they've lost the ability to lose the excess weight they've gained. If you've tried diets in the past and found them to be successful but are finding it difficult now, this could be for a variety of reasons unique to your lifestyle. However, one reason may be out of your control.

One health condition not mentioned above that appears to affect both Canadians and Americans equally—particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic began—is anxiety. In Canada, panic disorders and generalized anxiety affect about [5 percent of the population](#). The percentage of Americans who struggle with anxiety is closer to [18 percent](#). Given the stigma attached to mental health disorders, it's estimated that only 37 percent of people with anxiety seek treatment. All this anxiety may be contributing to your struggle to lose those recently gained pounds.

Long before Covid-19 caused a global quarantine, the National Library of Medicine (widely considered the world's largest library for biomedical research) published two studies (five years apart) about the effect that stress-induced cortisol has on [men](#)'s and [women](#)'s bodies. Both studies concluded that when our bodies are under constant stress, we produce high levels of cortisol, which contributes to a larger number of fat deposits than usual.

If this feels eerily familiar, it may be difficult to know whether to address the constant barrage of stress or the weight gain, and the inevitable trio of chronic conditions that accompany excess weight.

Got Stress?

If you are feeling paralyzed and unsure whether to address the excess weight gain or the anxiety first, you can do both simultaneously.

If you've considered talking with a professional such as a therapist, that's fantastic! It never hurts to talk with someone who can help you determine the source of your stress and anxiety, and help you alleviate it.

But before you consider taking a pill to reduce your anxiety, consider this: cannabis can help regulate serotonin levels naturally. A [2010 study](#) concluded that the cannabinoid CBD, "reduces anxiety in SAD (social anxiety disorder) and that this is related to its effects on activity in limbic and paralimbic brain areas."

Sandra Guynes is a cannabis nurse and founder of the [Kush Nurse](#). After a battle with physical and emotional trauma, her doctor [prescribed antidepressants](#), which are known for their side effects including weight gain, insomnia, loss of sexual desire, chronic fatigue and more. Although Guynes wasn't on them long enough to experience specific side effects, she did feel "off."



Sandra Guynes, MSN, RN is the Kush Nurse.

So Guynes looked for a plant-based solution. “Unlike pills, which take weeks to determine whether they’re even effective,” she explained, “I found relief with cannabis immediately. Not only were my panic attacks reduced right away, but I was no longer feeling fuzzy, unable to see past my anxiety. I continued consuming and suddenly things were actually clear for the first time in a long time.”

Initially Guynes reports that her husband, who’s retired from the military, was against the idea of consuming cannabis. But she showed him the studies and of course had her own outcomes to point to.

He had to agree she was no longer plagued with anxiety and was returning to the person she used to be. It was a journey to go from believing cannabis was a gateway drug to discovering its incredible properties, but seeing Guynes’ transformation, her husband started doing his own research—not into consuming but into growing.

“[In] California, [it] is legal to grow up to six plants, and my husband’s logic was that we should be in control of the herb I’m consuming. He’s become quite the cultivator. Of course our first harvest was a disaster, but now that we’re on our third harvest, we understand a lot more than we did.

“Being responsible for my medicine from seed to consumption, when I talk with my patients, while I can’t make any specific recommendations for dosage... I can explain in detail how the [cannabinoids](#) and [terpenes](#) in each strain play equally important roles in addressing their physical and mental needs,” she says.

“From pain and inflammation, debilitating conditions like multiple sclerosis, treating cancer symptoms and [PTSD](#), cannabis is truly an invaluable medicinal plant.”

Intermittent Fasting: A Modern Twist on an Ancient Concept

If you’ve been worrying about your weight, and/or how you’ll address high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes and/or hypertension, you could very well be looking at the same solution for all three.

Many cultures around the world have [fasted for religious, spiritual and/or medicinal reasons](#) for millennia. Dr. [Jason Fung is a nephrologist](#) in Toronto. He is widely considered the foremost expert in what’s known as intermittent fasting, or IF for short.

As a nephrologist, Dr. Fung explains on his website that the main benefits of weight loss through restricted eating are reductions in blood pressure, cholesterol and [A1C, or glycohemoglobin levels](#). Although he makes no promises that by limiting one’s eating to eight hours a day a person

will go into [diabetic remission](#), he uses it as an effective tool to reduce and even eliminate his type 2 patients' need for [insulin](#).

He discusses the role the increased insulin has on the liver to address rising blood glucose levels. He also explains in depth about fat stores in the body and the role IF plays in releasing those fat stores. Dr. Fung also describes how [menopausal and post-menopausal women](#) who've gained weight—particularly in the belly—can benefit from IF.

Unlike other methods of losing weight, IF isn't considered a diet, but rather a lifestyle. The concept is very simple: fast for 16 hours a day and eat during an eight-hour window. There are [variations on the 16:8 theme](#): alternate day fasting (ADF), 18:6, 20:4, 23:1, and one meal a day (OMAD).

The concept of calorie restriction for weight loss and to control blood glucose levels isn't a new one, but it doesn't work for everyone. And in truth, [restricting calories to under 1,500 per day isn't healthy in the long run](#).

To determine a healthy number of calories for your height, weight and activity level, the [Mayo Clinic has a great calculator](#). If you're like many people who are cautious, try the “slow and steady wins the race” approach to IF. By fasting 16 hours a day, you won't experience overly dramatic losses in weight or in your blood work, but for many experienced IFers, it's easy enough to follow, and most importantly, it's sustainable.



Some people find that intermittent fasting improves their health and stress levels.

First pick an eating/fasting window that works best with your lifestyle. Two popular ones are eating between 8 am and 4 pm, or noon and 8 pm. If your family tends to eat their biggest meal at night and you want that together time, the latter may work better for you. Some opt for going to sleep on an empty stomach and eating shortly after they wake up.

If you're wondering what you can eat while doing IF, the answer for most is whatever you want (within reason). In theory, you can eat whatever you want, but over time you'll find you're likely to change your relationship with food, and might come to prefer whole foods to processed ones while reducing salt and sugar.

Typical losses are about one to two pounds a week. Many IFers have found that by eliminating sugar, reducing their sodium to around 1,000 milligrams a day and drinking at least half their body weight in fluid ounces of water, the weight comes off a little faster, particularly at the start of IF.

It's also important to note that intermittent fasting, while successful for most people, should not be attempted by those with [disordered eating, those who have type 1 diabetes, or those who are pregnant and/or are nursing](#). And as with any change of your lifestyle, you should discuss this with your doctor. Not all are on board with IF. If yours isn't, rather than finding a new doctor right away, show them the links to studies provided in this article.

Strike a Pose

Exercise is an important aspect of healthy living. We all know this, but with our routines dramatically interrupted due to the Covid-19 pandemic, finding the time or a safe environment to do this can be challenging. Yoga is one way to help your body physically and mentally.

If you're at all familiar with yoga, you know about its many health benefits: strengthening of muscles, better posture, improved breathing and mindfulness are just the obvious ones. We're all fielding stress from multiple sources: financial, possible illness (Covid-related or otherwise) of yourself and/or loved ones, and juggling the educational, physical and emotional needs of your family with your own are just a few. Coupled with the loneliness many North Americans have reported, it's understandable that people are feeling completely overwhelmed.



Yoga can be a great way to manage Covid-19 stress, and a great tool to teach your children.

Angie Franklin is the owner of [Afro Yoga](#). She is certified in both [Power Vinyasa](#) and [Kemetic](#) Yogas—a not-so-well known form of yoga originating from Ancient Egypt. Her approach to yoga is very holistic.

“We’re all dealing with incredible amounts of stress—more than even usual,” says Franklin. “Stress and anxiety can be the result of trauma, both repressed and repeated, and ongoing. We can’t avoid everything, and much of what stresses us and creates anxiety is out of our control.”

Both stress and anxiety activate the fight or flight in us, she says.

“We’re conditioned to internalize our anxiety and stress. That’s the old model. The new one is all about soothing the nervous system and activating the parasympathetic nervous system. Doing both allows our bodies to go into rest mode. Yoga has myriad proven [medical benefits](#) and it’s sustainable.”

There is no magic pill to better physical and mental health, but then again, would you take it seriously if there was? Cannabis consumption, intermittent fasting and yoga are practices that have been around for thousands of years. They’re not new fads. Each has proven benefits, and offer sustainable ways to improve. You owe it to yourself to treat your body like a temple.

This was originally published in [Cannabis Health](#) and is republished with permission.