

History and Physical Examination Elements for Involuntary Weight Loss

Category	Element	Notes
History	Depression	Depression is a frequent cause of IWL, accounting for 10-20% of IWL patients.
History	Smoking	Smoking can be associated with diseases causing IWL
History	Fatigue	Fatigue can be associated with diseases causing IWL
History	Nausea or vomiting	Nausea and vomiting can be associated with diseases causing IWL
History	Change in cough	Cough and change in cough can be associated with diseases causing IWL.
History	Increase in appetite	Increase in appetite can be associated with diseases causing IWL
History	Symptoms suggesting malignancy	Look for symptoms such as hemoptysis, hematochezia, breast changes, lymphadenopathy, hematuria, and urinary symptoms. Cancer is most common physical cause of IWL.
History	Gastrointestinal symptoms	Gastrointestinal causes of IWL are second most common physical cause of IWL.
History	Medication history	Many medicines can cause IWL by inducing anorexia, dysgeusia, gastrointestinal symptoms, dry mouth, confusion or inattention, or a movement disorder. Ask about antibiotics, anticholinergic agents, antiparkinsonian agents, digoxin, iron supplements, NSAIDs, opiates, potassium supplements, SSRIs, theophylline preparations, thyroid hormone supplementation.
History	Thyroid symptoms (mainly hyperthyroid)	May be asymptomatic, especially in elderly.
History	Oral health	Ask about dental status, chewing problems, or oral problems that might limit food intake. A study of 100 Veterans Administration patients evaluated on a geriatric rehabilitation unit found that the number of general oral problems was best predictor of IWL within 1 year of admission. A study of 563 community-dwelling adults age 70 and older found that approximately one third lost 4% or more of their body weight. Edentulousness, female gender, and advanced age were independently associated with IWL.
History	Social history	Social isolation, poverty, and immobility are associated with functional IWL.
History	Severe chronic heart failure	New York Heart Assn. class III or IV may be associated with IWL.

Table modified from Physicians' Information and Education Resource (PIER), *Involuntary Weight Loss* module.