

Stress Eating And Your Waistline

from the American Counseling Association

It isn't news that America has a weight problem. Almost daily, the media are full of weight loss tips while millions of dollars are spent on special diet plans, and yet the problem isn't disappearing.

For many people the problem may be not so much what their food choices are, but rather why they eat. Research has found that stress-related eating is one of the most important reasons for overeating.

Eating when faced with stress is a natural reaction. Many foods affect our moods and feelings. Some may remind us of better, simpler times (think comfort foods), or they may actually bring chemical reactions that make us feel better (think sugar high), at least for a short time.

Unquestionably, we live in a stressful world. From news reports of tragedies, to family issues, to the daily traffic jams we may experience, stress is a common occurrence and one that many of us deal with by reaching for something to eat. Doing so takes our mind off our tension and stress and leaves us feeling better. And so we do it, often without thinking, until that bathroom scale tells us something is wrong.

So how can you avoid using food as a stress reliever?

Start by focusing not so much on what you're eating, but when and why you're eating. Experts advise keeping a diary for a few days and recording what you eat, when you eat and what you're feeling at the time. What you may find is that, without realizing it, you've been snacking, often unhealthily, not at times when you're really hungry, but simply when you're feeling stressed.

A next step is accepting that the food you're eating doesn't make your stress or problems go away, and may even be increasing your stress as you add on extra pounds.

This is the time to start analyzing the sources of stress in your life and seeing what you might do to reduce or manage that stress. Consider non-food related activities, like exercising, reading, gardening or similar relaxing activities. Often, simply being aware of what is triggering your stress-related eating is enough to help you avoid it.

It isn't easy to overcome stress-related eating, but it can be done. If you find that your eating issues are serious enough to be affecting your health, talk to your family physician or consider consulting a professional counselor who specializes in this area.

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