

The Evening News And Your Waistline

from the American Counseling Association

Whether you get your updates from a TV news show, the local paper, the Internet or just conversations with friends, these days the odds are good that what you're hearing is mostly bad news. And even when that news doesn't directly affect you, it can cause reactions that are very real and often fairly negative.

Most people aren't aware that simply hearing about bad things can increase the levels of anxiety and stress they are experiencing.

And, unfortunately, many people react to higher stress levels by turning more to something we all find comforting – food. It's called "stress eating" because it feeds an emotional rather than a physical hunger.

We do it because food, especially sweet things, trigger emotional and chemical reactions in our bodies that do make us feel better, though only for a sort time (then it's time for another snack).

Stress eating is a problem because it's one of the most common sources of excessive weight gain, something that can directly impact our self-image and health.

So instead of reaching for that donut the next time the stock market is tumbling, look for alternative ways to handle the stress.

Try analyzing why you're eating -- are you snacking because you're physically hungry or simply because you're stressed or bored or unhappy?

If it's emotional eating, try activities besides eating that can help calm you. Exercise, for example, not only burns calories and improves muscle tone, but also boosts the action of feel-good neurotransmitters in your body. And just a walk around the block will do the job.

Other stress busters include reading a book, listening to music, or just calling a friend.

And if you do need to snack, make it a healthy choice, like that piece of fruit instead of a donut or candy bar. Foods high in sugar and calories might quickly elevate good feelings, but they also lead to a sharp emotional crash as sugar levels drop.

Eating in response to stress is a common but fixable problem. Think about why you're eating and what you could do instead to help you feel calmer and more relaxed without resorting to food. Sometimes just being more aware of stress eating can do a great deal to minimize the problem.

If you think you are stress eating and want to get in control, consider seeking the help a professional counselor can offer to overcome the problem.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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