

Stress Can Make You Fat

Stress

Not only does stress cause headaches, high blood pressure, chest pain, stomach aches, and insomnia; **stress can also make you fat**. Stress from your job, a poor relationship, financial issues, the current state of world affairs – regardless of the reason, stress has become a normal part of everyday life in today's society. However, now more than ever, the effects of stress stretch way beyond casual anxiety and discomfort; in fact, stress can lead to significant weight gain – and can even be deadly.



Stress: The New 21st Century Norm

More and more, it seems like everyone around us is significantly impacted by stress; consider the following:

- The health of nearly 50% of all Americans is negatively impacted by stress.
- An estimated 9 out of every 10 visits to medical professionals are for stress-related conditions.
- OSHA considers stress a workplace hazard that contributes to nearly \$300 billion in lost earnings each year.

Stress Causes a Massive Hormone Dump in the Body

Stress-induced weight gain can be traced all the way

back to the development of the body's fight or flight response (the defense mechanism that has kept our species alive all these years).

When our body is exposed to chronic and prolonged stress, our adrenal gland responds by releasing large amounts of the hormone cortisol. When released during the "fight or flight" response, cortisol provides the body with the boost of energy needed to stand your ground – or to high-tail it out of the reach of danger.

The stress experienced millions, thousands, and even hundreds of years ago by our ancestors typically involved fighting (or running) for survival. While the stress we experience today might feel like a life or death situation, it usually is not. However, that does not preclude the body from reacting like it has for millions of years.

But, How Can Stress Make You Fat?

When exposed to prolonged periods of stress, the cortisol released by the body causes a number of health issues contributing to weight gain, including:

- **Slowing of the Metabolism.** As a reaction to stress, the body attempts to conserve energy by slowing down metabolism and the number of calories used. Over time, and without intervention, this results in weight gain.
- **Increased Blood Sugar Levels.** Chronic exposure to stress can result in increased blood sugar levels. These increased levels are directly related to fatigue, mood swings, and even diabetes. Extreme cases of stress have also contributed to the development of metabolic syndrome, a condition that often results in diabetes or serious cardiac issues, including heart disease.
- **Unhealthy Cravings.** The hormones released during stress often cause the body to crave foods that are high in

fat, salt, and sugar. The more stressed you are, the more likely you are to make poor food choices – which is more likely to result in unwanted weight gain.

- **Increased Fat Storage.** Since stress is the body's reaction to impending danger, it automatically goes into conservation mode, storing as much energy – in the form of fat – as possible. Unfortunately, stress-related fat storage is more likely to occur around our midsection. Not only does this result in an unsightly fat belly, abdominal fat has been directly related to more dangerous health risks than fat stored on the hips or other parts of the body.

Stress-Related Weight Gain: Not Just A Hormonal Reaction

While our bodies are programmed to respond to stress by releasing cortisol and other hormones, it is not the only reason stress can make us fat. Many of us just make poor decisions when stressed, including:

- **Emotional Eating.** Many of us respond to the nervous energy associated with stress by eating – and by eating large amounts of unhealthy foods. For some reason, stress causes us to respond with an oral reaction. Not only does this include nail biting, and teeth grinding, but also the seemingly uncontrollable urge to eat salty, sweet, fatty foods.
- **A Desire to Return to Our Youth.** Sometimes as a way to escape the uncomfortable feelings caused by stress, we return to the comfort foods associated with our childhoods. Foods like ice cream, cake, cookies and candy bring us comfort by offering a temporary escape by returning us to the wonderful pre-stress memories associated with the “good old days”. Unfortunately, a slowed metabolism and increased caloric consumption

often results in dangerous and unhealthy weight gain.

- **Decreased Desire To Exercise.** Stress-related eating and weight gain contribute to a dangerous cycle those results in decreased energy and increased fatigue. As you gain weight, your body's desire to exercise decreases; often, as a way to escape the feelings of guilt, you eat more. Eating more results in weight gain, which decreased energy levels...and the cycle continues, increasing your risk of serious health conditions.

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