

Stress & Weight Gain

There are several factors that contribute to weight gain. The obvious being low activity levels and a high calorie diet. But what about the less obvious such as sleep, stress and even age (metabolism). Here we are talking the effect that stress has on body weight. These days, stress seems to be quite common as we become busier and busier with work commitments, study, family and just trying to fit it all in. Add trying to maintain an exercise routine and healthy eating in there and we have a lot on our schedule. So how does stress effect weight and how can we control it.

Stress itself does not lead to weight gain. However, the increased “stress hormone” cortisol leads to an increase in appetite. This often leads to overeating which is the main cause of weight gain under stress. To make matters worse, high cortisol levels have you craving all the bad stuff. High fat, sugary and salty foods. So not only do you have an increased appetite, but you also have a craving for the chocolate, chips and burgers.

On top of this, stress is often caused by having too much to do with not enough time to do it in. Pressure at work? If only there was an extra few hours to finish that project. Too many errands to run before picking the kids up from school and starting the homework, dinner, bath, bed routine? When you are stressed out and time is a problem, what is the first thing to go in your routine? Exercise and meal prep. You are more inclined to reach for fast and convenient foods and ditch the workout to get on top of the huge to do list you have to conquer. Stress also tends to mess with your ability to sleep, and as mentioned earlier, sleep can also influence your weight (but that topic is for another day). Increased appetite, cravings for bad food, less exercise, more fast food and bad sleep. You can see how stress can lead to weight gain.

Then how do we combat unwanted weight gain from stress? Find what coping strategies work for you. Whether it is; meditation, going for a walk, reading a book, breathing exercises, taking on less and reducing some of the pressure on yourself. Everyone will have something that will help them cope with stress. Find it! And do not skip the workout. Exercise releases feel good endorphins, is great for your mental health and allows you to take a break from everything else going on around you. Yes it might be hard when you have so much to do but make exercise a priority. It will be good for the mind, body and soul.

