

STRESS EATING

Stress can be defined as the degree to which you feel overwhelmed or unable to cope as a result of pressures that are unmanageable. **How do you define stress? Is it different from anxiety?**

We are a society of people who are overworked, overscheduled, exhausted and of course, STRESSED. The pace of life these days does not allow us to take a breath, relax, or spend an afternoon doing absolutely nothing. Even though most people recognize they experience stress on a regular basis, few of us are intentional about stress relief. We think this is just how life is. Life is stressful. OR we deal with stress in unhealthy ways. These include smoking, drinking, distracting ourselves by going on FaceBook or EATING. The goal is to distract myself and my thoughts from the stressor instead of processing it.

Does eating improve stress and/or anxiety?

If you are a stress eater then undoubtedly this practice has worked for you so you continue to do it. If stress eating didn't help the stress, you would have stopped long ago.

Eating helps relieve stress in one of two ways usually.

I use food and eating as a distraction to avoid thinking about what is stressing me out.

For example, I feel stressed out over a presentation I have to make in front of my peers tomorrow so instead of thinking more about the presentation, I distract myself by ordering pizza. As I eat the pizza, I am no longer thinking about work. I am thinking about how delicious it is. YES! This works. But as soon as I am done eating the pizza, my thoughts return to my anxiety over how the presentation will go. So I go to the refrigerator and get some cookie dough. YES! This works. But as soon as I am done eating the cookie dough, my thoughts return to the presentation. Repeat the rest of the evening until I go to bed.

I use food and eating as a way to take my mind off of what is stressing me out and instead turn those thoughts into self-loathing.

I feel stressed out over a presentation I have to make in front of my peers tomorrow so instead of thinking more about the presentation, I distract myself by ordering pizza. As I eat the pizza, I am no longer thinking about work. I am thinking about how delicious it is. YES! This works. As I keep eating the pizza and get to slice number 4 and then 5 I cannot stop eating it. My thoughts turn to self-loathing, shame and regret. I eat all but one piece of the pizza and disgusted with myself I finally stop. Then after a short break I tell myself I've really blown it today so another ice cream bar won't matter. I'll get back on the wagon tomorrow. So I go to the freezer and get an ice cream bar. Now I feel really disgusted over what I've done BUT I distracted myself and didn't stress over the presentation. Mission accomplished!

So eating DOES help with stress and/or anxiety, but only temporarily. If it didn't work, you wouldn't keep doing it!!

Stress eating can be a dangerous habit. If you live a life full of stress and you often turn to food then overeating will affect your weight and your health in numerous ways.

Stress itself actually KEEPS US FROM LOSING WEIGHT. First, remember when we talked about how our brains are wired and how they live for the moment and instant gratification? When you are stressed, the brain will prioritize a quick fix even more. This means it will be harder to make a healthy choice in the moment.

Secondly, when the body feels stress, it releases a hormone called cortisol. Cortisol, in normal levels, helps to regulate our blood pressure and blood sugar. It aids in proper glucose metabolism and well as helps us with our immune response. But TOO MUCH cortisol can have negative effects. It can increase blood pressure and abdominal fat. It can decrease brain function, bone density and our bodies ability to fight off infection. So if we are overly stressed our bodies can experience the negative effects of too much cortisol.

How does cortisol increase abdominal fat? It's a hormone that moves triglycerides out of storage and relocates them as visceral fat cells in the abdomen of the body. So a rubber tire ring can be the result of ongoing stress.

Today we are going to develop a plan to better deal with the stress in our lives. Let's complete your stress eating worksheet now.

