

Stress & weight



How does stress affect your weight?

Stress is a big reason why people relapse while trying to lose weight. Why?

Stress influences choices we make — including whether we exercise, what foods we eat, how much we eat and when we eat. Some stress is normal; however, too much stress can make achieving and maintaining a healthy weight a challenge.

For many people, trying to lose weight is stressful. Losing weight takes time and requires change — two prime causes of stress. It's important to realize that when you make changes, your new behaviors become routine. This eventually leads to *less* stress.

Can stress cause you to GAIN weight?

Probably. Stress can get in the way of your intentions to exercise and eat well. Stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol, may also be somewhat to blame.

Stress hormones prepare your body for a perceived threat or danger, which can be helpful in a life-threatening situation. Your body reacts similarly to stress in your daily life (your job, finances, family matters, etc.)



The problem is, your body can't tell the difference. So the stress is not life-threatening, but your body continues to react as if it is. Your weight and well-being may be impacted.

Adrenaline increases your breathing, heart rate, and blood pressure.

Cortisol increases the amount of blood glucose (sugar) to your brain (to help you think fast and focus your attention) and to your muscles (to help you run fast and increase your strength). Plus, it may stimulate appetite after the stress has passed.

Finding distraction and relief

Stress can make you look for distractions or other things that make you feel better. Eating, drinking, or watching TV are common distractions. Although these things may distract you from stress, the relief is only temporary.

If you don't address the "why" behind the need for distraction, you will most likely continue to use these comforts to manage stress. Learning to recognize your emotions, your triggers, and your go-to distractions is the first step. From there, you can develop strategies to avoid the habits that get in the way of your progress.



Make time for yourself

Managing stress requires taking some time for yourself. It isn't selfish. When you take time to just relax, you are better able to perform your job, enjoy life, care for others, improve your well-being and lose weight. Feeling run down or stressed-out isn't good for you or your weight.

Stress less: Identify, prevent, and cope

Use this activity to become aware of what stresses you out. From there, figure out what stress you can avoid totally and how you can better cope with the stress you can't avoid.

- **Identify**

What makes you stressed out?

How do you respond when you are stressed?

- **Prevent**

What stress can you avoid completely? How?

- **Cope**

What stressors can't you avoid?

How can you better cope with them?

What will you do for yourself to deal with stress?