

HEALTHY COPING IN TIMES OF STRESS

HOW TO GET THROUGH STRESSFUL CIRCUMSTANCES WITHOUT USING FOOD AS PRIMARY TOOL

STRESS IS DEFINED AS A STATE OF MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL STRAIN OR TENSION RESULTING FROM ADVERSE OR VERY DEMANDING CIRCUMSTANCES

HOW DOES STRESS IMPACT OUR FOOD HABITS?

Stress can have an impact on our appetite in two major ways:

- ❖ Stress can cause people to ignore their hunger cues and refrain from eating for long stretches. In the short term, stress can **shut down appetite**. Epinephrine (a hormone also known as adrenaline) is released and it helps trigger the body's fight-or-flight response- a revved-up physiological state that temporarily puts eating on hold.
- ❖ But if stress persists — or is perceived as persisting — it's a different story. The adrenal glands release another hormone called cortisol, and cortisol **increases appetite** and may also ramp up the motivation to eat. Cue mindless eating.

WHY STRESS MAKES US OVEREAT

- ❖ Cortisol triggers cravings for salty, sweet, and fried foods—foods that give you a burst of energy and pleasure. The more uncontrolled stress in your life, the more likely you are to turn to food for emotional relief.
- ❖ Eating can be a way to temporarily silence uncomfortable emotions, including anger, fear, sadness, anxiety, and loneliness. Coping with food may make you feel better in the short-term by avoiding the difficult emotions you'd rather not feel but can make you feel worse in the long-term.

HEALTHY COPING TECHNIQUES THAT REDUCE STRESS

- ❖ **Breathing deep:** Calming your physiological responses is key to reducing cortisol naturally. Imagine blowing through a straw as you exhale. Count to 10 on the slow, deep, in-breaths. Slowing down your breathing tricks your body into believing that it is going into sleep mode, thus signaling the rest of your body to just relax.
- ❖ **Meditate- Quick meditations to do anywhere:**
 - **4,7,8 breathing:** Inhale for 4, hold for 7, exhale for 8. Repeat 5-10 times when you start feeling stress to rise

- **Box breathing:** Inhale for a count of 5. Retain and hold the breath for a count of 5. Exhale all the breath from the lungs for a count of 5. Retain and hold the breath for a count of 5. Repeat
- ❖ **Exercise:** Intense exercise increases cortisol levels temporarily, but low-intensity exercise seems to reduce them. Physical activity also helps increase the production of your brain's feel-good neurotransmitters, called endorphins. Exercise can also improve your sleep, which is often disrupted by stress, depression and anxiety.
- ❖ **Connect with others:** Don't underestimate the importance of close relationships and social activities. Spending time with positive people who enhance your life will help protect you from the negative effects of stress. Give them a call if you're feeling overwhelmed.
- ❖ **Make time for relaxation:** Give yourself permission to take at least 30 minutes every day to relax, decompress, and unwind. This could look like making a cup of tea, taking a hot bath, or simply taking a nap.
- ❖ **Aim for 6-8 hours of sleep every night:** When you don't get enough sleep, your body craves sugary foods that will give you a quick energy boost. Getting plenty of rest will help with appetite control and reduce food cravings.
- ❖ **Keep doing what works for you:** read a good book, watch a comedy show or movie, explore the outdoors (safely), or turn to an activity you enjoy such as playing an instrument, painting/drawing, scrapbooking etc.
- ❖ **Limit media:** watching the news constantly can cause your stress levels to rise. Mute all notifications related to the news and only check it once a day. If something important happens, you'll find out about it.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ❖ **Savello Health App:** On-demand help with stress, anxiety and depression
 - FREE premium access during the COVID-19 crisis
- ❖ **Headspace App:** Guided meditation app
 - To help support you through this time of crisis, they're offering some meditations you can listen to anytime. These are part of a larger collection in the Headspace app — free for everyone — called Weathering the storm. It includes meditations, sleep, and movement exercises to help you out, however you're feeling.

