

Stress, Sleep & Weight Gain

One-third of all Americans are living with extreme stress according to a recent national survey. Nearly half of all Americans believe their stress levels have increased over the last five years. Stress is usually considered to be mental/emotional or physical from trauma or repetitive motion. There are stressors in the environment that include toxins in our air, food and water, deficiencies in our food, electromagnetic radiation from cell phones, microwaves, computers etc., and chemical sensitivities. These stressors are having a negative impact on overall health.

Stress has a cumulative effect on the body. This increasing stress is having a negative impact on sleep habits. A majority of adults (63%) do not sleep the recommended eight hours per night. Eight hours of sleep nightly is needed for good health and optimum performance, according to the National Sleep Foundation.

Research shows that Americans have cut their sleep time by 1-2 hours a night over the past 40 years. This trend towards more stress and less sleep coincides with Americans becoming heavier each year. It is no surprise then that recent research has found both stress and sleep to be correlated with weight gain.

During sleep the body regenerates and repairs itself. Less than eight hours of sleep adversely affects hormone levels. The brain interprets the hormonal change as a sign of starvation, resulting in hunger. As appetite increases, the body also burns fewer calories to conserve energy. This is where the storage of fat occurs. The body will

store calories as fat to create future energy reserves to prevent future starvation.

Lack of sleep also affects insulin resistance and blood glucose levels. Insulin is the hormone that moves glucose (aka blood sugar) into the body's cells, to be burned for energy. When sleep is less than that required by the body, sugar is moved into the blood to activate the energy of the body at higher rates than normal. When sugar appears in the blood more frequently than it is needed, the body becomes insulin resistant. Insulin resistance means that the body no longer allows insulin to work efficiently. This results in higher blood sugar levels, and increased risk of heart attack, stroke, and diabetes.

Where and how you sleep can also have an effect on the body. Sleeping on the couch, on a mattress that is too soft, too hard or uncomfortable also contributes to stress. Failure to properly support the head and neck can create physical stress on the body. The body does not need additional stress when it is sleeping. Sleep is the time that the body is supposed to recover from stress. When the body experiences more stress during sleep, the body does not rest well. Some of the signs of a stressed body are inability to sleep well, waking up tired, cravings for sugar and/or stimulants, unwanted weight gain, moodiness, memory issues, and an inability to handle daily living.

When the body is stressed, it releases different hormones to help deal with the stress. One hormone affects the body in a "fight or flight reaction" by decreasing the appetite, and increasing the heart rate. Another hormone takes all the blood out of the digestive tract to put it into the muscles so the body

can fight or flee. Too much stress then causes digestive problems, and an inability to metabolize food properly. Besides digestive difficulties, chronic stress results in additional weight gain.

Cortisol, another hormone, is produced during stress and helps to balance blood sugar and insulin. When insulin levels drop during the stress response, the body looks to quickly replenish its energy stores. Low blood sugar causes a craving for sugar, and/or carbohydrates. As insulin is released to move the newly consumed sugar into the cells, cortisol is released to balance the blood sugar levels. Any excess sugars are then stored away as body fat. Prolonged stress causes excess cortisol production, increases insulin production, weight gain, inflammation and more stress.

Stress may also affect weight gain in other ways. Aside from the effect of cortisol on the body, stress often leads to nervous energy. An increase in nervous energy in some people leads to nervous or emotional eating. In addition, stress is also largely associated with a lack of time. This lack of time may affect being able to prepare healthy meals, leading to an increase in fast food consumption, resulting in additional nutritional stress. Stress may also lead to less time to exercise, and then to a lack of sleep, thus creating a vicious cycle...

What can you do?

1. Try a stress-reducing activity such as listening to soothing music or going for a walk.
2. Maintain a regular bed and wake-time schedule, including weekends. Get 8 hours of sleep.
3. Get organized. Create lists and schedules to get work done. Delegate tasks when possible.
4. Stop eating 2-3 hours before

bed. Eating a large meal late at night can make you more uncomfortable when you lie down for bed and thus interrupt sleep. If you awaken during the night, eat a light protein snack before bed to keep your blood sugar stable overnight.

5. Avoid foods like sugar and caffeine that cause a stress reaction in the body.
6. Get daily exercise in the form of walking. Walking for 20 minutes a day will decrease stress and elevate mood for up to 2 hours. Regular exercise helps to reduce stress, making it easier to fall asleep, and contributes to a more sound sleep. Do not attempt to over-exercise beyond what your body can handle. Too much exercise can cause additional stress on your body.
7. Balance your hormones. There are simple non-invasive tests to evaluate your cortisol, insulin and stress handling hormone levels. When hormones are balanced, weight gain does not occur overnight or when the body is stressed. Get checked today.

Disclaimer: The recommendations in this article are not to be taken as medical advice. Please consult a qualified health care practitioner to obtain your own stress and/or hormone evaluation, and for specific recommendations on your personal health issues.



Dr. Carol Ann Fischer, D.C., N.D. is a unique Chiropractic Holistic Wellness Consultant in Livonia, with over 23 years of specialized training in stress reduction, gentle chiropractic, nutrition, weight

loss, natural hormone evaluation and therapy, detoxification, wellness care, homeopathy, and acupuncture. She believes that everyone deserves the chance to get help to reduce their stress. Her goal is to help people to live happy, healthy and stress free. For more information on her free public workshops on stress, weight loss, hormones and wellness www.TLCHolisticWellness.com or contact her by email at tlc4health@sbcglobal.net.

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Laura, a Reiki Master and Brennan Healing Science practitioner also offers Reiki I and II workshops and certification as well as guided trips to Brazil to visit the amazing healer, John of God, at his spiritual energy center. Join in the free weekly support groups or attend a Reiki share night. Guest presenters are routinely scheduled. Details and schedules are located at: www.BelovedSpirit.com. To schedule an appointment or for further information, call 734-476-9555 or email: Laura@BelovedSpirit.com



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Reiki Master, Life Coach
Brennan Healing Science® Practitioner
Daughter of the Casa and Sanctioned Guide to “John of God” in Brazil

