

Stress and weight management!

Over time, stress can contribute to overweight or obesity when people cope by sitting still, eating poorly or making unhealthy choices, and by interfering with sleep. As we mentioned in our sleep issue, deep sleep is when researchers believe that the hormones leptin and ghrelin get adjusted in the body, with leptin giving you a feeling of fullness, and ghrelin making you feel hungry. If you get too much or too little sleep, those hormones are thrown out of balance.



Don't you love it when someone says "just don't stress" to you? If only it were as simple as just "not" experiencing stress!



But stress is a reality of life – and it's more a matter of being better able to manage it.

Let's Talk About Stress!

Stress is part of being alive, so it is impossible to avoid it entirely. Positive events like moving into a new house or planning a big party can be stressful. Negative situations like financial woes, or pressure from work can also be a source of stress. **However, too much stress of any kind can contribute to overweight or obesity.**

Sometimes even mundane things like getting stuck in traffic can make your pulse race and raise your stress levels. It's important to remember that not everyone experiences stress the same way or from the same causes – for some, stress may take the form of a specific cause (e.g., a difficult boss, financial woes, even being stuck in traffic); for others, worry and stress may just be part of their personality. The thing is, the body and mind don't really see the difference between stress from a good event or a bad event – how our bodies and minds react to stress is very much the same regardless of the source.



Quiz

Take this short quiz to see if the stresses in your life might be contributing to the overweight or obesity issues you have.

Yes or No? Do you...

1. Often neglect your diet when you are stressed?
2. Notice a change in your weight or appetite when you are stressed?
3. Tend to overeat when you are feeling pressure or stress?
4. Crave eating foods high in fat and/or sugar in times of stress?
5. Avoid being physically active when under pressure?

Although the above is only a partial picture of how stress can contribute to overweight or obesity, if you answered “yes” to most of the questions you may need some strategies for dealing with some of life's inevitable pressures before they snowball.



Read on for some tips on identifying and managing your pressure points!

Chronic Stress

Short-term stress from a single event can sometimes cause you to temporarily lose your appetite (for example, after having argued with a loved one). But if a person is under chronic stress – that is, long-term or repeated stresses (for example, being a caregiver for a sick relative or dealing with a difficult work situation day after day) – it may affect your ability to control certain food cravings. Why? In response to this type of stress, the body can increase the production of a hormone called cortisol. For some people, especially those more sensitive to the hormone, it can cause them to crave unhealthy fatty or sugary foods. In fact, eating those foods can actually soothe the part of the brain that controls stress.



What Can I Do?

There are some sources of stress you can't remove (e.g., if you're the caregiver of an elderly parent or child; work stress, etc). But by being mindful of what causes your stress and learning some new coping strategies to manage it, you can learn to change how you react to that stress. It won't remove the stress trigger, but it will reduce the stress reaction.

When?

- **You must carve out time for yourself to apply some stress-busting techniques**, like taking a walk to burn off some of the anxiety, or doing deep breathing exercises before bed. Your activity, eating, and sleeping routine will help with that as well. Avoid caffeine, which can add to the stress by mimicking stress-like symptoms like rapid heart rate and sleeplessness.

Why?

- Because stress can feel overwhelming sometimes, but it isn't necessary to let it get out of control so that it contributes to your overweight or obesity. Remember: it isn't about the stressful situation – that's out of your control. **But you do have a choice about how you react to and manage that reaction.**

What?

- There are many things you can do. For starters, **being more active is a top stress buster**. What sounds better – sitting still with your stomach in knots, or going for a walk to give that excess energy somewhere to go? Take up a hobby you enjoy: read, listen to music, go for a walk or listen to music while you walk to give your mind and body something to focus on other than your source of stress.

How?

- Stress can become a habit, and like all the other unhelpful habits we've discussed, this one needs to be considered as well. Some tips for managing and preventing stress right now include:
 - **Learning to say "no".** It takes practice, but really take a look at the things you agree to and say no to the ones that will cause you unnecessary stress. People will understand because they have had to learn to say "no" too! Saying, "I'm sorry – I am just too busy this week to do that" feels a lot better than saying "Sure!" and then trying to cram in an overwhelming task.

- Start making decisions – often, the worry about making a decision is worse than making the actual decision!
- Avoid putting things off and letting them pile up. Tackle things methodically and one at a time as they arise...you'll be glad to have them out of the way instead of nagging at you.
- Ask for help with your workload. Sharing and delegating are some of the tricks of people who are effective work and stress managers!
- Although it seems cliché, there's a lot to be said for **reframing negative thoughts to be more positive.**



Mind Shift



From here

"I feel I have more to worry about than other people; stress is just a part of my life and I can't do anything about it."

"I feel that stress might be contributing to my overweight or obesity because I've been making poor food choices."

To here

"Maybe other people have just as much or more stress than I have and have just learned how to better manage it. I'll make time to take a quick walk around the block and then do some deep breathing exercises to try and help myself."

How to get there

Taking care of yourself is important. Addressing how you react to stress is important as leaving it unchecked can have negative effects on your weight management program.

If you feel your stress is out of control or causing you any setbacks, talk to your healthcare professional or a **CONTRAVE Support program** nurse counsellor to help get back on track!



Food for Thought

There are many ways to cope with stress – you can talk about it with a friend, or with a counsellor if you need more help with coping. Learn to simplify your life instead of having so much going on all at once, then use that time to add in the activity to help both relieve stress and manage your health. Look for opportunities where you can change your thinking habits. Do you always need things to be perfect or do you always focus on the worst-case scenario? Both of those habits make things seem more overwhelming than they actually are, so look to see what is realistic about the issue.

Let's go back to the pro and con exercise we've applied to the other habits and see how you can change your mindset.



Pro

I like being someone people can count on so I don't mind biting off more than I can chew.



Con

Doing too much may result in doing many things, but this may also be contributing to my stress level, which in turn may affect my weight management.

Once you learn to slow things down by being mindful of your stress, you can apply that mindfulness to your eating as well!

Eating mindfully means taking the time to:

- Set meal and snack times and focus only on those, rather than multitasking.
- Eat slowly and enjoy each bite.
- Taste the flavours and textures of your food.
- Notice when you feel hungry, and as you start to feel full.



Learning to cope with stress may help you stay with your weight management plan.

And remember, if at any time you have questions about your **CONTRAVE** therapy and would like to speak to a nurse counsellor, call **1-855-CNTRAVE (1-855-268-7283)** from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday to Friday EST.

CONTRAVE is a prescription medicine that is used for weight management:

- in patients who have obesity or;
- in patients with overweight and at least one medical condition associated with their weight (such as high blood pressure that is controlled with medicine, Type 2 diabetes, or a high amount of lipids (cholesterol or other types of fat) in the blood)

CONTRAVE should be used along with a reduced-calorie diet and increased physical activity.

CONTRAVE should be taken exactly as your Healthcare Professional tells you to.

Please refer to the **Patient Medication Information** insert in your product package for important safety information.

Contrave **Support
program**