

The Inner Diet

You Can't Change Your Weight Until You Change Your Mind!

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Part II: Stress Eating

Welcome to Part II of my eight part series on emotional eating. I would like to begin this discussion today by addressing the most common issue that leads to diet disaster and weight loss failure...**Stress.** Stress eating is a very common problem among those who have difficulty controlling their weight. As a matter of fact, it's been found to be the number one issue that interferes with weight loss. My research with The Inner Diet also shows that a whopping 74% of all overweight people stress eat to some degree so the odds are that, if you're overweight, you're a stress eater. The bottom line for stress eaters is that, until they deal with this issue, they are unlikely to succeed at weight loss. Simply put these people habitually overeat in response to stress. It's an emotional coping mechanism that they use in an attempt to reduce tension by self-medicating themselves with unhealthy food.

A bad day at work, an argument with your significant other, dealing with unruly children or the simple tension that comes from the boredom of being stuck in the house all day are all examples of things that can trigger this kind of stress eating behavior. As you know, however, the sad truth is that eating in response to stressful situations always makes you feel worse and eat even more. The end result is a cyclical Stress Eating pattern that causes additional stress, added tension and even more weight gain.

Unfortunately, stress is an unavoidable part of everyone's life and we all experience stress in many different forms. Physically, stress presents itself to us in a variety of ways including; fatigue, neck and back tension, upset stomachs and headaches to name only a few. It can also lead to serious health issues including obesity. One of the main ways that stress presents itself emotionally to us is through overeating. Now you obviously can't totally eliminate stress from your life, however, you can learn how to eliminate stress eating from your life and this is essential for those of you who want to lose weight. The reality is that stress is your body's invisible enemy and, as a result, it has a very powerful influence on your health, your weight and your eating habits.

A couple of examples of how you can deal with stress in general, as well as the *stress eating behavior* that typically follows, can be found in the following two examples. A general approach targeted at reducing your overall life stress can be found in a simple stress management technique called Progressive Muscle Relaxation. I'm sure you're familiar with this simple activity as it involves alternately tensing and relaxing the various muscle groups throughout your body. You typically begin by sitting or lying down in a comfortable position, closing your eyes, taking some deep breaths and then tensing and relaxing specific groups of muscles in a predetermined and orderly sequence. Most professionals suggest beginning with your hands and then moving to your arms, shoulders, neck, head, torso, legs and finally your feet. This, I might add, is a very reliable, tried-and-true technique for creating relaxation by reducing the overall physical stress and tension in your body.

An example of how you can specifically address the emotional response of *stress eating* can be found in the next example that I call the **Stress Eating Challenge**. I have found that one of the easiest ways to identify the "*stress eating danger signs*" is simply by increasing your awareness of exactly when it

is about to happen. Here is an example of how you can increase your awareness of stress eating which, thereby, puts you in a position to cut it off at the pass and prevent it. Whenever you are about to eat something, simply rate yourself on the following three statements:

Stress Eating Challenge

1) **What is the amount of tension that I am feeling right now?**

None 0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Excessive

2) **I feel if I eat right now, I will be less stressed!**

Not At All 0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Definitely

3) **How truly hungry am I?**

Not At All Hungry 0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Very Hungry

If you rate yourself 3 to 5 on statements #1 & #2 and less than 4 on statement #3 you are most likely on the verge of stress eating. Since awareness is the key to change, this simple awareness technique is often enough to help you fend off a stress eating episode. I have been suggesting this little technique for years and many people find it extremely helpful. The fact that you must literally stop and ask yourself these three questions before actually eating anything throws the *spotlight of awareness* on that moment of truth when that critical decision to eat is made. And, as I always like to say - ***There is one moment when the decision to eat is made and, if you can manage that moment, you can solve this problem!*** This activity, thereby, interrupts your habitual knee-jerk reaction to stress, throws a spotlight on that moment of truth and, as a result, gives you the opportunity to make a healthier choice.

As I mentioned earlier, you can't totally eliminate stress from your life, however you can change the way that you react to stress. Eliminating stress eating from your life will make you feel stronger and more self-confident as well as greatly improve your chances for successful weight control.

This ends Part Two of my eight part series. In Part Three I will discuss the second most common emotional eating trigger called... **Psychological Discomfort.**

Wishing You Great Health,

Dr. John H. Sklare