

Get Psyched!

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Welcome to *Get Psyched!*, the Carolina Performance newsletter on a wide range of topics to help you perform better. Our group consists of psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, and consultants who are ready to help you improve your performance, in any aspect of your life. Visit us at Suite 201 in the AIHF, look at our website: www.CarolinaPerformance.net, or call **676.9699** for more information.

Want to Lose Weight? Learn to Relax, by Dr. Michelle Joshua

Ever try to lose weight by doing what you believe are all the right things, like changing diet and exercise patterns, but then get stuck at a plateau? This frustrating experience is a common phenomenon for many of my clients who struggle with weight loss. The good news is that health researchers are increasingly highlighting the negative impact of emotional stress on the waistline, which offers yet another avenue for weight loss intervention.

Many of us know that perceived stress can have negative physical health consequences, such as muscle tension, increased blood pressure, and elevated cholesterol levels. In addition, we intuitively know that feeling overwhelmed and “stressed out,” isn’t helpful for our emotional well-being either. However, what many people underestimate is the role that acute and chronic stressors play in our weight regulation system. Researchers have suggested that stress-induced over-eating is a major factor in obesity.

Here’s how it works: At the first sign of stress, our appetite is suppressed. No need to feel hungry when being attacked by

bears, for example. The adrenal glands release adrenalin and cortisol into the bloodstream. Immediate energy is needed to fight off the stressor. The body pulls from the most readily available, most efficient energy store, the fat around the abdomen. After the stressor has been relieved (no more bears), cortisol induces a refueling by increasing appetite, especially for fats and sugars. The cortisol will lay the new fat around the midline because it is the quickest place to access for energy in the future.

Back in the days of being hunters and gatherers, this process worked efficiently to both access and store energy. In modern times, however, it is more likely that our stressors are not bears, but rather more chronic events like financial pressure, work stress, or sleep deprivation. The result of the ongoing stress is that cortisol levels remain high because stress is never resolved and the appetite is continually stimulated. In the real world, it is not uncommon for people to not feel hungry all day while working (because the appetite has been suppressed). When they return home after the stress of

work has been removed, it is possible that refueling may lead to over-eating and/or a food binge which feels impossible to thwart, regardless of one’s willpower.

So getting back to the good news, we can break the stress-fat cycle in a number of ways. The most obvious method would be to look at ways in which we can reduce our daily stress level. If we are less anxious, worried, harried, overwhelmed, (insert negative emotion here), we are less likely to maintain elevated cortisol levels in our bloodstream.

The best way to reduce your stress is to find the one, two, or three strategies that work for you. Here are 10 suggestions to get you started: change your work environment, practice time management, exercise regularly, reduce your personal commitments, engage in spiritual practice, call a friend, read a book, listen to music, get a massage, or just breath deeply.

For more stress management ideas and support, contact Carolina Performance at 676.9699.