

Stress Often Leads to Overeating and Extra Weight

For those who reach for a cookie when times get tough, stress may take a toll on the waistline.

Researchers found that for people who said stress often drove them to eat, the comfort food of choice tended to be greasy, salty or sweet. Not surprisingly, such "stress-driven" eaters, particularly women, weighed more on average.

The researchers looked at over 5,000 individuals at four points in their lives -- birth and ages 1, 14 and 31. At age 31, the participants' body mass index, eating habits and methods of coping with stress were studied. Those who said they often or sometimes tried to make themselves feel better by eating and drinking were designated as stress-driven eaters.

The researchers found that these individuals were more likely than others to frequently eat **pizza, hamburgers, sausages and chocolate**. They also drank more alcohol, on average.

For both men and women, body mass index -- a measure of weight, taking height into account -- was higher among stress-driven eaters than others. For women, obesity was associated with eating to cope with stress.

Men were more likely to eat in the face of stress if they were single, divorced or frequently unemployed. The tendency was also seen in men with academic degrees -- which is surprising since higher education is often linked to lower rates of obesity.

They speculate that the **young men in this study may be more susceptible to stress caused by on-the-job demands compared with older, more experienced workers**.

Among women, those who felt a lack of emotional support in their lives had a greater tendency to eat to cope with stress. The researchers conclude that efforts to prevent or treat obesity should address the ways in which people cope with stress.

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