

STRESS EATING — spot it and stop it



Stress eating, also called emotional eating, happens when a person eats in response to stress or emotions. Stress eating isn't cued by actual hunger — and the behavior can lead to overeating, consuming junk food, and over time, weight gain.

Hunger and stress are linked. Some studies show that stress hormones can cause the body to crave certain foods. And sometimes it can be difficult to know whether you're stress eating or actually hungry. How do you tell the difference — and what should you do when you want to turn to stress eating?

Signs of hunger

First, it's important to be in tune with the body's hunger cues. If you see signs of hunger, it may be time for a meal or snack. Consider the following:

- **When did you last eat?** If it's been three hours or more, you're probably hungry.
- **Is your stomach grumbling?** This is often a sign that your body is looking for food.
- **How do you feel emotionally?** Are you stressed out or anxious at the moment? If so, you may be looking for food to help calm your feelings.
- **Could you eat nearly anything right now?** With stress eating, a person will often crave a specific food, such as ice cream or chips. If you feel like you could eat a salad or an apple, you may be actually hungry.
- **Do you have a headache, nausea or weakness?** These may be signs that you waited too long to eat.

How to curb stress eating

Perhaps you've found that you do eat more during times of stress and you want to stop. Try these tips:

- **Drink a glass of water.** Dehydration can often be mistaken for hunger, and it may help take the edge off.
- **Go for a walk or exercise.** This relieves stress and can help take your mind off of food.
- **Call a friend.** If something is bothering you, try to talk to someone you trust.
- **Try deep breathing, yoga or meditation.** If you can, sit down and take deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth when you feel stressed. This has a calming effect and may help you overcome the craving. To help manage everyday stress, consider taking a yoga or meditation class.



Over time, you may find it gets easier to avoid stress eating. Each time you deal with stress without food, be proud of your accomplishment!