



# Stress and Eating

Each day our body receives and sorts through information from a variety of sources:

## External Environment

- Schedule, pace of life
- Number of priorities or commitments, etc

## Lifestyle

- Poor diet,
- Poor sleep
- Inactivity
- Smoking, alcohol, drug use, etc.



## Internal Environment

- Medical conditions
- Pain,
- Depression, anxiety etc.

## Thinking Traps

- All or nothing thinking
- Perfectionism
- Negative thinking
- Over thinking
- Excessive worry, etc.

The number of 'inputs' our brain receives at one time determines how 'stressed' it is which can have a significant impact on our energy, motivation, thinking, feelings and our behavior choices! It's important to note you might not feel stressed as you might have become 'used' to or have learned to cope with a high input of stressors. Although you may feel you're coping there is still a negative impact on your choices and health.

## Low stress

A small amount of stress is adaptive because it makes us feel:

- Creative, good problem solving
- Energized, focused and motivated



## High stress

Too much, or poorly managed stress is mal-adaptive as it makes our thinking negative and narrow. We feel tired, overwhelmed and our thinking traps increase.

## What is the connection between your stress level and eating habits?

The higher levels of brain inputs or stressors, the more susceptible you are to cravings for sugary, fatty, salty and crunchy foods. Even though you 'know' you're not hungry or shouldn't eat those foods, at the moment your brain is ruled by your impulsive, emotional brain. You'll find yourself rationalizing your cravings and finding ways to satisfy your need for immediate gratification. Each time you eat whether it is consciously or unconsciously to soothe your brain, the habit of emotional, stress or mindless eating gets stronger and more difficult to change.

## Address the Root of the Problem vs. the Symptom:

Although you may be tempted to focus on gaining control of your cravings during times of stress, this strategy has limited success and may even set you back! Instead, turn your attention to improving your stress resiliency and reducing the inputs/stressors your brain is dealing with at any given time. When you feel balanced you will have the energy, clarity and commitment to stay true to your goals!



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PROVIDER INFORMATION

PATIENT INFORMATION

PATIENT-PROVIDER  
COMMUNICATION TOOLS

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### **Getting to the root might include:**

- Engage in meaningful activities make you feel creative, connected or inspired.
- When possible, off-load some responsibilities that are wearing you down
- Get active to help you off-load stress and energize yourself
- Regularly take time for self-care
- Focus on strengthening your positive thoughts and self esteem
- Manage your health and medical conditions
- Make healthy lifestyle choices as best as you can

See further suggestions in the **What's Driving Your Hunger** Handout