



# Employee Enhancement Newsletter

*Helpful Resources from your Employee Assistance Program*

March 2013

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## Strategies to Decrease Stress-Driven Overeating

Do you ever use food to relax or calm your nerves because of too much stress?

For many people, reaching for food is an automatic response to stress. Feeling tense? Reach for a cookie. Many don't even realize they have this "automatic" programming.

When you're feeling stressed, food can have a calming effect. The trouble is that eating food as a response to stress does nothing to alleviate the real cause of stress. Though "comfort foods" might provide short-term relief, using food to relieve stress can lead to an unhealthy habit of stress-driven overeating.

If you are overweight, or if you feel guilty, mad at yourself or believe something's wrong with you due to your eating in response to stress, the information below can help you decrease stress-driven overeating:

### Information, tips and strategies

1. Understanding your brain...It's not just about having willpower. Withstanding the urge to eat certain unhealthy foods or withstanding the strong desire to overeat is not "just about having willpower." Your brain is constantly trying to achieve balance. When you're faced with too much stress, powerful signals go off within the brain to urge you to do something that will calm and relax you, to relieve the brain of the feeling of stress. Eating certain foods can release powerful mood-altering chemicals in the brain that can provide a quick "high" or mood lift. Stress-driven eaters have trained their brain to reach for certain foods to provide relief from stress. It is difficult to ignore these strong messages consistently. However, you can re-train your brain and learn other pleasures (besides eating) to effectively satisfy your urges.
2. Learn to distinguish the difference between physical hunger and eating to relieve stress. Many people are unaware that they eat food in response to stress and confuse the physical discomfort brought on by stress with the physical discomfort of needing food. Getting a handle on stress-driven overeating begins by recognizing the difference between physical hunger and emotional eating. Physical hunger builds gradually, is felt below the neck (stomach), occurs hours after a meal, goes away when full, and eating leads to a feeling of satisfaction. Emotional hunger develops suddenly, is felt above the neck (having a "taste" or craving for chocolate), is unrelated to the last time you ate, persists despite fullness, and eating leads to feelings of guilt. When you feel the urge to eat, get in the habit of asking, "Is it physical hunger or is it emotional hunger?"

## Chat Reminder

### Stress and Overeating

Connect with Deer Oaks and a counselor for a live confidential chat.

#### When:

March 20, 2013

#### Where:

[www.deeroaks.com](http://www.deeroaks.com)

#### Session Times (CST):

- 12:15 PM to 12:45 PM
- 6:00 PM to 6:30 PM





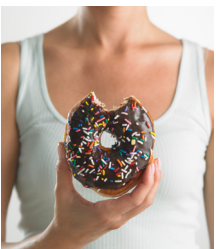
## Strategies to Decrease Stress-Driven Overeating Continued...

3. Increase your self-awareness. Use a food diary to identify when and why you eat to manage stress. For at least one week, write down what you eat, how much you eat, how you're feeling and how hungry you are. You may become aware of situations or feelings that trigger stress-driven overeating. For example, you may discover that you overeat on evenings at home after work as a way to reduce fatigue and relax. With this awareness you can then consider ways to take care of your emotional stress without involving food.
4. Face stress-causing problems head-on. If stress triggers overeating, address the sources of stress. Look for solutions to the problems at hand, talk them over with a friend or counselor, or write in a journal. Acknowledge and address feelings of depression, anxiety or anger. Do whatever you can to reduce feelings of stress.
5. Engage in healthy activities that give your brain pleasure and stress relief. Just as you may have gotten used to eating as a reaction to stress, you can re-train your brain to seek other sources of pleasure that increase the mood-lifting chemicals in the brain that create feelings of calm and relaxation. You might consider the following:
  - *Exercise* - Exercise is proven to reduce stress, improve your mood, help control appetite and improve sleep quality. All of these factors help reduce emotional eating. Even a ten-minute walk can make you feel less stressed and more calm.
  - *Meditate* - Repeat a positive word, phrase or prayer. It gives you a break from negative thoughts, relieves stress and promotes calm and relaxation.
  - *Listen to Relaxing Music* - Studies have shown that listening to relaxing music can decrease the production of a substance in the body called cortisol. Cortisol can lead to cravings for carbohydrates. Music can also relieve stress and increase relaxation.
  - *Other Possibilities* - Look for more activities that can help you feel more calm and relaxed: Take a warm bath, read a good book, get a massage, practice guided imagery, engage in a hobby, work in your garden, journal your feelings or talk to a supportive friend, enjoy or develop your spirituality, sign up for a class, engage in activities that bring humor into your life.

### Final thought

If you're attempting to decrease stress-driven overeating and find that you occasionally give in to it, forgive yourself and try to learn from the situation. Make a plan for how you can prevent it in the future.

[http://www.healthy-exchange.com/content/archives/anxiety\\_strategies\\_to\\_decrease\\_overeating.html](http://www.healthy-exchange.com/content/archives/anxiety_strategies_to_decrease_overeating.html)



# Understanding Carbs

Carbohydrates (or carbs) are one of the main types of nutrients in our diets. Fats and protein are other nutrients.

Carbs with a simple chemical structure are called sugars. Sugars are found naturally in foods such as fruits, vegetables, and milk products. They are also added to many foods and drinks.

Complex carbs, such as starches and fiber, are found in whole-grain breads and cereals and in starchy vegetables such as potatoes. Your digestive system changes the carbs you eat into glucose, a type of sugar that your body uses for energy. Simple carbs are more quickly digested and absorbed than complex carbs, so simple carbs can raise your blood glucose levels faster and higher. If you have diabetes, you need to manage your blood glucose levels. High blood glucose can damage your tissues and organs.

It makes sense to eat more complex carbs, according to researchers at NIH. And not just people with diabetes, but everyone. They are more gradually absorbed and help control blood sugar levels.

Whole foods with complex carbs will give you more minerals and vitamins too and are usually good sources of fiber.

Some wiser choices are these:

- Choose cereals high in fiber (5 or more grams per serving, read the label for this information).
- Switch to whole grains. Look for whole-grain bread, whole-wheat pasta, brown or wild rice, barley, quinoa, and bulgur.
- Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables and drink less juice.
- Try different kinds of beans and lentils.
- Snack on fruit and small portions of nuts and seeds.
- Limit candy.



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## *Buddy up*

Exercise with someone you perceive as better, and you'll increase your workout time and intensity to keep up by as much as 200%, according to a Kansas State University study. Partner up, but choose someone with more advanced skills who'll push you to work harder.

Health-e headlines™

## *Cancer & Exercise*

Numerous studies have shown the powerful effect that exercise can have on cancer care and recovery. For patients who have gone through breast or colon cancer treatment, regular exercise has been found to reduce recurrence of the disease by up to 50%. But many cancer patients are reluctant to exercise, and few discuss it with their oncologists, according to a Mayo Clinic study published in the Journal of Pain and Symptom Management.

Health-e headlines™

## *An EAP Reminder*

*Life Can Be Hectic. The EAP Can Help You Find Your Balance.*

Deer Oaks, your EAP, is always available to you and your household members.

If you are struggling with children, finances, or just want some practical advice on health or the mind-body connection, contact Deer Oaks by calling the Helpline.

Counselors are available 24/7 to provide you with immediate care.





## New You

Why wait to create a new you? Live your best life now. This advice comes from researchers at Washington University:

- *Learn something new.* Take a class in a subject you enjoy or are curious about. Check your community colleges for noncredit continuing education classes. Rekindle your love of learning.
- *Volunteer.* It's good for your physical and mental health whether you're building a house for someone, ladling out soup for the homeless, or collecting canned goods. You'll make valuable community connections.
- *Get your social media house in order.* The Internet and social media have opened up exciting new possibilities to connect with others and new vistas to share preferences in films, books, and music. Have fun. But be cautious. Check your default privacy settings. Log out and see what your profile looks like to the outside world. Make sure passwords are complicated. Don't use the same password for all social media accounts.
- *Rediscover the library.* The digital revolution has changed your local library. You can often download books online. Consider how much your library offers: novels and nonfiction works for all ages, how-to books, music CDs, movies on DVD or videotape, maps and reference works. Read the latest magazines or journals.
- *Step away from your desk.* Physical activity improves health, lowers stress, and increases productivity. And if those weren't reasons enough, research shows that exercise reduces the risk of diseases such as breast cancer, colon cancer, and Alzheimer's.
- *Pay down your credit card debt.* Put extra money toward the loans with the highest interest rates. Consolidate several small debts.
- *Use your smartphone to quit smoking.* You can tap into apps for messages of support and access websites that give step-by-step encouragement.
- *Kick the car habit.* Leave the SUV in the garage and try alternate means of transportation such as the bus or train, bicycling, walking, or park-and-ride commuting.
- *Parents:* Make every day count. Happy, well-adjusted children need happy, well-adjusted parents.
- *Get more sleep.*
- *Consume more culture.* The arts not only educate and entertain, they help us to better understand ourselves and others. Visit your local museums, galleries, theaters, dance companies, and music halls.

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# Make a Personal Budget and Keep Track of Spending



As soon as you start spending your own money, it's time to start tracking your spending so that you can create and follow a personal budget. Tracking your spending, while sometimes tedious, is the best way to find out exactly where your money is going.

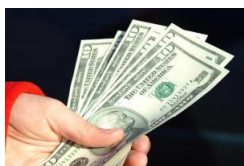
The simplest way to track your spending, especially your cash, is the low-tech way, with a notebook and a pen. By carrying around the notebook, you can track exactly where every dollar is going—from a small coffee on your way to work to a spending splurge at the mall. If you'd prefer, on a daily or weekly basis, you can transfer your handwritten notes to a computer spreadsheet.

Once you have collected information for about a month, you'll have a good baseline of information to use to create your personal budget. Some major categories that you'll want to include are housing, utilities, insurance, food (groceries and dining out), gasoline, clothing, entertainment, and "other". Using a spreadsheet program (such as Excel), online service, or other personal finance program, add up the expenses that you've been tracking, and then calculate what you'd like to budget for each category. Keep in mind that you'll need to budget for some items, like gifts and automobile repairs, which will be necessary but won't occur every month. You can either create a budget for each individual month, with variances for irregular expenses (e.g., heating expenses which will be higher in winter months, or car repairs and gifts), or a standard monthly budget where you include an average amount for expenses such as car repairs, heating, and gifts.

Your budget should also contain some personal savings amounts for retirement savings, college savings, an emergency fund, long-term savings, and any other savings goals you may have. Don't wait until the end of the month to see what's left—budget for your savings first.

Creating the budget is a good first step, but the most important thing is to follow the budget. Make time weekly or monthly to track your spending, and start to see if you are actually keeping to your budget. Using a personal finance program or an online service is probably the easiest way to do this on an ongoing basis, but make sure you continue to track where your cash is going. You may be surprised to find out how the frequent small amounts you spend actually add up to big money.

After tracking your personal budget, you may notice some areas where you'll have to make changes. Don't just increase your budget without considering alternatives. While you may have no choice, if prices or expenses go up, shop for better deals before giving in to the extra expenses.



## About Money Management International

*Money Management International (MMI) is a nonprofit, full-service credit-counseling agency, providing confidential financial guidance, financial education, counseling and debt management assistance to consumers since 1958. MMI helps consumers trim their expenses, develop a spending plan and repay debts. Counseling is available by appointment in branch offices and 24/7 by telephone and Internet. Services are available in English or Spanish. To learn more, call 800.432.7310 or visit [www.MoneyManagement.org](http://www.MoneyManagement.org).*