

## The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

### Stress Eating And Your Waistline

from the American Counseling Association

Summer and bathing suit season are just around the corner and that has a lot of us looking in the mirror and wondering how we can make those excess pounds disappear.

While there are a number of reasons for being overweight (sure, you know most of them -- poor food choices, excessively large servings, too much snacking, not enough exercise), one that is often over-looked is stress-related eating, one of the major reasons that people overeat.

Most of us live in a world full of stress. From national tragedies to family problems to traffic jams, we all face situations that add stress to our lives. And, unfortunately, many of us react to that stress by reaching for something to eat.

It's actually a natural reaction. Many foods can affect our moods and feelings. They may remind us of better, simpler times (think comfort foods), or may actually bring chemical reactions that make us feel better (think sugar high), at least for a short while. Over time, we learn that reaching for that candy bar takes our mind off our stress and actually leaves us feeling better. And so we do it.

But how can you avoid using food as a stress reliever?

Start by looking at when and why you're eating. Keep a diary for a few days of when you eat, what you eat and what you're feeling at the time. You may find that the times when you're snacking are the times when you're not feeling hungry, but simply stressed.

A next step is accepting that the food you're consuming is actually doing nothing to relieve your stress. Food doesn't make problems go away and it may even increase stress by leaving you feeling guilty about overeating and excessive weight gain.

Rather than reaching for more food, start analyzing the sources of stress in your life and what you might be able to do to reduce or manage that stress. Look to non-food related activities, like exercising, reading a book or just walking the dog. Spending time with friends or family can help, too. Often simply becoming aware of what triggers your stress-related eating is enough to help you avoid it.

It isn't easy to overcome stress-related eating, but it can be done. If your eating problem is a serious one that's affecting your health, consider consulting a professional counselor who specializes in this area.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).*

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