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For Your Information

Great American Smokeout

Every year on the third Thursday of November, smokers across the nation participate in the American Cancer Society's Great American Smokeout® by smoking less or quitting for the day. The event challenges people to stop using tobacco and raises awareness of the many effective ways to quit for good. Telephone quitlines are a convenient new resource, available for free in many states. Call 1-800-ACS-2345 to find a quitline or other science-based support in your area.

The following resources provide additional information regarding quitting smoking:

American Cancer Society
1-800-ACS-2345
www.cancer.org

American Heart Association
1 800-242-8721
www.amhrt.org

National Cancer Institute
Cancer Information Service
1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237)
www.cancer.gov

Nicotine Anonymous
www.nicotine-anonymous.org

Smokefree.gov
1-877-44U-QUIT (1-877-448-7848)
www.smokefree.gov

Source: American Cancer Society.

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 due to eating in response to stress, or if you feel guilty, mad at yourself or believe something's wrong with you because you often use food to "numb out" as an escape from 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 retrain 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?"

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.

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.

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 retrain 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.

Getting help

Some eating to promote feelings of calm or relaxation is considered well within the range of normal and healthy behavior. However, problems arise when stress-driven overeating becomes excessive and interferes with good health, or signals that painful emotional needs require attention. If stress-driven overeating is a problem, contact Human Management Services (HMS) for CONFIDENTIAL counseling, referrals or information. Your HMS counselor can help you identify the source(s) of your emotional stress and help you develop an action plan to overcome your unhealthy use of food to manage stress and learn healthier ways of living. If you need help, why not contact an HMS counselor today? We're here to help.

Financial Tips For The Holidays

Financial advisors say it's essential to prepare a spending plan well in advance of the holidays and avoid impulsive and emotional purchases. "If you look at the reasons people end up in financial difficulty," says Katie Shern of the Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Greater Atlanta, "impulsive spending is the major reason. And the major time for that is Christmas."

What most people don't realize, financial experts say, is that spending too much during the holidays can cramp their style all year long.

How To Economically Survive The Holidays

Below are tips on how to economically survive the holiday shopping season:

1. Establish an overall spending limit. Create a written plan for holiday spending and gift giving a month or two in advance.
2. If you've had a rough year financially, shrink the gift list. Talk with those you exchange gifts with and suggest either not exchanging gifts or observing lower dollar limits on gifts.
3. Spend cash and avoid writing a lot of checks or using credit cards.
4. If your plan includes paying for some gifts by credit card, use just one or two credit cards when shopping rather than several. Know which credit card you use, the interest rate it charges, and above all, use it cautiously.
5. Check details of "special" financing offers. Some can be more expensive than they appear.
6. Beware of "Buy Now Pay Later" offers. If you can't afford it now, you probably can't pay for it three months from now.
7. Small financial gifts, rather than toys, can help relatives with the costs of growing children.
8. Think small. Most people prefer smaller, more personal gifts. Put extra thought into your gifts, not extra cash.

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