

Stress

I have a particular interest in stress management, as I believe stress to be one of the greatest drivers of the obesity epidemic. This is the case for many reasons, including:

- It makes you hungry, so you eat more, you eat faster, and you make healthier choices.
- It makes you too tired to exercise.
- It causes insomnia, which also leads to obesity and further stress (see my handout on insomnia)

Stress is the great antithesis of the Chill Pill, which I consider to be one of the *true* magic pills to weight loss, for many reasons. Indeed, it is an endless cycle – stress causes obesity and vice-versa. As such, Stress Management is one of the Four Cornerstones of my weight loss program, the SvelteLife Weight Loss System. In addition, stress has many other negative health effects. Not only do I discuss stress here, but also depression and anxiety, which often go hand-in-hand with stress.

Some important stress reduction techniques include:

- Exercise (most important).
- Chomp on healthy snacks.
- Make “me” time mandatory:
 - Take a hot bath.
 - Read a book or visit a library.
 - Visit a museum or allow yourself to bask in “life” some other way.
 - Get out of the house, take some time off, enjoy the great outdoors, experience nature, get away.
 - Call a good friend or family member to talk.
 - Forget yourself in the service of others.
 - If a parent, read a book or play a sport or game (active or not) with your child.
- Take up a healthy hobby.
- Get a pet (unless it causes more stress).
- Play, or learn to play, an instrument.
- Smile more and lighten up a tad.
- Hum, whistle, or sing a pleasant song.
- Meditate or pray.
- Relax through modalities such as deep breathing, massage, listening to soft music, taking a nightly bubble bath, etc.
- Get a good night’s sleep – this is paramount. Reducing stress (with the above techniques) can help you sleep better, too (it is a cycle).

Indeed, stress and feelings of being overwhelmed are ubiquitous. They come as a result of a job situation, financial difficulties, health issues, loss of a loved one, relationship problems, world events, time restraints, deadlines, and more. Stress can significantly increase one’s drive to eat.

Psychological issues probably play a much larger role in the obesity epidemic than most realize. When we have deep emotional issues, we eat because we are trying to fill some void in our lives. If this applies to you, it is imperative that you address these things.

This treatise is not the place to provide a detailed dissertation about managing deep, unresolved issues. If you struggle with any of these things – especially if they are starting to affect, or have long affected, how you function in different areas of your life – *please* tackle them head-on by seeking help from a competent health care professional. The two of you may decide that counseling, support groups, or medicine will help.

Everyone has a different threshold for handling stress without overeating. You will never know how much it is contributing to your drive to eat until you begin to identify and address each cause of stress one by one, especially those that are self-imposed. Self-imposed deadlines and the pursuit of material things may also need to be reevaluated. Simply sorting through these things may allow you to breathe more easily.

Besides the items mentioned above, other things you can do to help reduce stress include:

- Avoid triggers.
- Change the way you react to stressful situations.
- Try not to worry about things you cannot control, and do something about the things you can (remember the familiar “Serenity Prayer?”).
- Recognize that bad things happen to good people all the time, completely beyond anyone’s control. All you can do is your best, and then do your best to deal with the rest. In the end, at a minimum you will have grown and learned empathy.
- Have faith that as long as you are doing your best, things will always work out for your good.
- Do not wrap up your emotions in things of little redeeming value, such as when a sports team loses.
- Resolve conflicts and relationship issues with others.
- Make sure you are not the cause of stress for others (you will reap what you sow).
- Work to change your environment for the better.
- Make tough decisions to reverse self-inflicted causes of stress.
- Do not procrastinate; prepare well ahead of time for deadlines.
- Take care of health problems (a huge source of stress), and seek regular preventive care from your doctor.
- Get out of debt, live within your means, and quit trying to keep up with the Joneses (read Dave Ramsey’s [Total Money Makeover](#))
- Leave for work, the airport, and appointments with time to spare, so you do not have to stress over traffic.
- Keep a positive attitude and do not focus on negative things, *alone or in discussion with others*.
- Look outside yourself and reach out to help others.
- Allow others to help you.
- Turn off the cell phone and pager.
- Delegate.
- Free your schedule of unnecessary or excessive meetings or appointments. Unclutter your life.