

Stress Eating

Mindfulness Worksheet

Date / Time:

What have you brought mindful awareness to today? Check all that apply.

Heart

Mind

Body

Breath

Environment

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



1. Psychological stress, generally caused by feelings of anxiety, affects our lives in many ways that we don't see. It can affect sleep patterns, relationships with others and health, mainly weight issues.
2. For some people, anxiety causes them to lose their appetite, often causing a loss of weight. But for others, anxiety causes a craving for "comfort" foods, often unhealthy food choices which can cause a weight gain.
3. Stress can trigger high levels of cortisol, which is known as the stress hormone, to be released from our adrenal gland, and also trigger insulin to be released from our pancreas.
4. These in turn stimulate appetite. So after a stressful event, you may feel very hungry, but it could be from a high level of cortisol and not a true caloric need.
5. Mindful breathing and body awareness, can help you focus on your physical state and determine if the hunger feeling is true hunger or emotional hunger.
6. High cortisol and insulin can cause a craving for "comfort" food-- sweet or salty foods that are high in fat. Once the comfort foods are consumed, the cortisol hormone is lowered, which calms the stress response.

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7. This, however, is only a short term effect until the anxiety triggers the cortisol again, then the cycle repeats. This continuous cycle can lead to feelings of guilt and excess calories from giving in to the cravings.

8. High cortisol and insulin causes the body to take in more calories than it burns so these calories are stored as visceral fat (belly fat).

9. Belly fat is more harmful to health than fat stored elsewhere in the body because visceral fat releases pro-inflammatory factors and fatty acids into the blood. On the bright side, visceral fat is the easiest to lose, and losing just a few inches from the waist can dramatically reduce risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

10. Mindfulness can help prevent stress eating and the impulse to turn to food and give in to cravings by providing alternative coping responses for anxiety.

11. Mindful eating can also be helpful when the craving is too strong to resist by promoting awareness and enjoyment of the food being consumed - eating more slowly and savoring the food, thereby satisfying the craving with a smaller portion.

Stress eating journal

Think about past stressful situations, do you tend to eat when you are feeling stressed? If yes, what foods do you generally eat during stressful times? List these foods below and see if these are healthy or unhealthy food choices.

During the next few weeks, write down any stressful situations you encounter and how you dealt with the situation. Did you use mindfulness practices for an alternative coping response to your anxiety or did you give in to the cravings of stress eating? If you turned to comfort food, were you able to use mindful eating to satisfy your craving with a smaller portion?

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Whatever your response, do not be discouraged, it takes time to break an unhealthy habit just as it takes time to develop one. Awareness of the situation is in your favor though as it is impossible to break a habit you are unaware of.

How will you take what you learned from this forward into your life?
