

Stress Management Introduction

Stress is everywhere. Life is stressful! How we manage stress determines its impact on us and our health. Stress can be both physical and psychological; regardless of source, there are downstream changes in our neurotransmitters and hormones.

Acute stress in small doses has relatively little long-term impact. In fact, our bodies are wired to handle acute stress easily. We respond by increasing the activity of our sympathetic nervous system (the neurotransmitters epinephrine and norepinephrine) and our adrenal system (the hormone cortisol). These changes then allow us to combat whatever acute stress we are facing. Evolutionarily speaking, for example, stress would increase our ability to run from a predator. In the twenty-first century we are now dealing with very different stressors, such as relationships with our peers and loved ones, traffic, finances, or school.

Our stress response helps us stay alert and responsive while giving a presentation in a classroom or to a board of directors. These stressors are normal.

So what is the problem?

1. We have a high stress load when repeated stressors stack up.
2. We commonly lack the tools to manage them.

We commonly lack the tools to manage this level of stress. Most people know what they should do (sit in the salt room, meditate, exercise regularly), but most do not make the time for it. Without using tools to manage stress regularly, or prioritizing them, our bodies cannot handle the repeated stress and in effect we “burn out” our ability to respond.

So what happens with this increased stress as it relates to our weight?

Stress increases cravings for salt, sugar, and fat and causes the body to hold on more tightly to fats, thereby making it more difficult to lose weight. Without getting too technical we then develop insulin resistance and increase obesity, specifically abdominal fat. If we do not simultaneously manage stress, we will be combating these systems while trying to lose the weight.

Therefore, we highly encourage taking care of yourself and implementing tools for stress management while in this program. The following section will have information on activities such as cardiac coherence sessions that directly impact our sympathetic overdrive. You will notice that meditation classes, salt room sessions, and most importantly the *Know Yourself* Workshops will directly address how to examine your life and tendencies for overeating.

We have included the following activities in the program to help you with your stress management:

- “My Why” Reflection Sheet
- Biofeedback Cardiac Coherence informational one-sheet
- *Know Yourself* Workshop informational one-sheet