Stress and Exercise

Succeeding at weight loss just got a little bit easier.

For most of you, your morning goes something like this: Your alarm goes off and you jump out of bed, grab a cup of coffee and head for the shower. Before you get out the door, you have kids, dogs, and maybe even a spouse to get ready besides yourself. You grab something to eat and head out the door.

And that is just the morning.

Our day to day lives are stressful enough, but then there are credit-card bills, computer problems, and 24-hour news shows broadcasting increasing worldwide tensions. Cell phones keep us close to our family and friends, but they also keep us close to work and people who need things from us. Add to that, what psychologists call major stressors such as losing a loved one, moving, changing jobs, or other large life event and you have a cocktail for stress and anxiety.

Stress is a way of life in our modern world, whether we like it or not.

Stress Affects Our Weight

Have you ever noticed that you eat more when you are stressed? It is common when people are first exposed to a stress to lose their appetite but when stress becomes chronic their appetite increases. This is one of the ways that scientists have been able to link our weight gain to how stressed out we are, but it goes much deeper than that.

It turns out that being stressed releases chemicals in our bodies that tend to increase

our weight. These stress hormones were never meant to be turned on for a long time. The hormones (mostly cortisol) work well when a tiger jumps out at us but when it is running around in our bodies most of the time, due to the many stressors in our lives, it leads to weight gain.

Exercise is the best stress-buster tool that you have.

Not only are you being active (which tells your body that you are getting away from that tiger), but you are also releasing another set of chemicals that tells you that you are okay and everything is going to be fine.

· Increases endorphins: brain chemicals called endorphins are released when you exercise. These chemicals are responsible for the "runner's high" some people feel when the run. Endorphins help us feel calm and happy.

· Meditation: exercise takes your concentration off of your daily worries and turns that focus to the game you are playing, the mountain you are trying to climb, or the friend you are out on a walk with. Like meditation, exercise takes you out of your head and puts the focus on your body and the present.

· Mood: regular exercise tends to increase self-confidence and contentment. Research has shown that exercise works for reducing anxiety and improving mood.[i]

Exercise doesn't have to be anything complicated, simple walking can do wonders to reduce stress.

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[i] Asmundson GJ, Fetzner MG, Deboer LB, et al. Let's get physical: a contemporary review of the anxiolytic effects of exercise for anxiety and its disorders. Depress Anxiety. 2013 Apr;30(4):362-73. PMID: 23300122.