

## HOW STRESS CAN AFFECT YOUR WEIGHT

Gyms and fitness centers are full this time of year, yet unfortunately many will drop out of the pursuit of fitness in a few months because of a failure to experience anticipated results, demands on their time, distractions, job demands and even because they received just enough benefits to relieve the pressing issue about the way they felt or looked. What ends up happening is that the problem of being “out of shape” or overweight is addressed on a superficial level. They “feel better” for the present, but end up back in the same place in a few months. Why?

The reasons are numerous but I only want to address one—stress. The reason many feel better when exercising regularly is because exercise helps reduce stress. Nevertheless, it does not eliminate it. Consequently, many exercise and feel better, but come up short of some weight loss goals because they are still stress eating or comforting themselves with food! The fact is that many need to make life and behavioral changes *in addition to* adding exercise and changes in diet, because if the stress is not dealt with it can undermine your health improvement efforts. Consider the following steps:

- When trying to reduce or eliminate stress, instead of just addressing the symptoms take a look at what is driving the stress.
- Journal your thoughts and feelings to raise your awareness of what is really going on in your life. Look back at the thoughts and words you often use repeatedly.
- Talk things through with your spouse, a close friend, or counselor with the goal of taking action—not just to commiserate with someone. *(Many find support groups helpful.)*
- Formulate a plan to deal with what drives your stress, just as you would develop a diet or exercise plan.
- Map out your anticipated progress and goals on the calendar to use as a guide and accountability over the next twelve months. *(Use Outlook and phone apps to give you automated reminders.)*
- Work your plan.

Dealing with the source of your stress will make so many things you do easier. You do not have to have the perfect plan, but you do have to have a plan and you have to work it. Adjust it. Alter it. But stick to it!

**Mark Beaird, LPC**

*\*Note: Always consult with your medical doctor before starting a weight loss regimen so that all health factors relevant to you are taken into consideration.*