



Relax and Lose Weight

You eat right. You are exercising - especially now that it is summer! Yet those extra pounds will not budge. Or you keep gaining despite what you are doing (and medical issues have been ruled out). What if I told you it has nothing to do with food or exercise? What if I told you that you need to get off the treadmill and relax more?

Relaxation is very different from sleep. Relaxation is different from watching TV or having a glass of wine with your best friend. Relaxation involves centering your energy, balancing your vibration and coming to that place outside your body and mind. Or some might say that place which connects body and mind. You might know this place as samadhi or zero point. Let me explain more about how our bodies work, why lack of relaxation can make a person gain weight and some possible sources of relaxation.

Our bodies use food and water to create energy. We eat and then our bodies shift into digestion mode. During this time,

they are focused on this effort. The heart still beats, muscles still move, but most of the body's energy and blood resources are diverted to the stomach and intestines. This phase is known as Rest and Digest. During this time, our parasympathetic nervous system is active. Depending on what was eaten, this takes a certain amount of time. Just like when we are working on a client, we have intense focus on the task at hand. Sure, we are still thinking about what to make for dinner or picking the kids up from school, but that is in the far recesses of our brains, not our immediate effort.

Some hours after digestion, when the food has been transformed into energy, our bodies set about using that energy for various functions. During this time, we easily work, exercise and perform activities which engage our sympathetic nervous system. This is also known as the Fight or Flight system.

Our body is always operating in one nervous system: parasympathetic or sympathetic.

The sympathetic and parasympathetic systems control the same groups of body functions: digestion; immunity; growth and repair; and reproduction, but they have opposite effects on those functions. Each system produces hormones and activates glands and organs. Two primary hormones of the sympathetic nervous system are adrenaline and cortisol. If you have ever done something scary or exhilarating, you may have experienced "adrenaline pumping" and a certain "high." Or maybe you have heard about a mother lifting a car off her baby or performing some Herculean feat beyond her ordinary strength. That is the result of adrenaline and cortisol kicking in. But what happens if we stay in that state too long?

When adrenaline pumps, blood pressure and heart rate increase. We experience a surge of energy. Cortisol increases blood sugar and increases the brain's use of glucose. Cortisol also decreases immune responses and suppresses several systems: digestive, reproductive and growth. When the digestive system is suppressed for an extended period of time, we do not digest food properly. There are several side effects from that, one of which is weight gain. When our bodies do not get appropriate nutrition (that is, nutrients from food), it sends a signal to the brain that more food is needed. The same thing happens when we eat junk food or food without nutritional value—this is one cause of overeating. As we remain in a stressful state, our body seems to need more food because we are not receiving nutrients from what we are eating.

Another side effect is our body sending signals to the brain saying we need more energy and that requires more food.



Whether your adrenaline/cortisol state is induced from running a marathon or a stressful situation, the message to your brain is the same: eat more. In the case of running a marathon, you will use those calories, so weight gain is not likely. In the case of stress, you will not burn the calories and, instead, they will be stored as fat.

What often happens in response to this is people decide that skipping breakfast or eating less will help them to lose weight or not gain weight. In this case, the body is now stressed and not receiving nutrition. The primary duty of your body and brain is to keep you safe—so it will respond to stress by pumping any available energy into making stress hormones and bringing blood to the muscles. Your body will not respond by breaking down existing fat for energy. Thus, any calories eaten will immediately be stored—adding to the malnutrition and weight gain.

As mentioned, if you have stress over a long period of time, many bodily systems are compromised. Some of the resulting symptoms include constipation, decreased sex drive and hair loss. Why? Because cortisol is regulating these functions and these functions are non-essential in emergency situations. Remaining in Fight or Flight mode can result in irritability, agitation, anxiety, insomnia, busy mind and hypervigilance. Some common causes of Fight or Flight mode include consuming sugar, (this may include fruit), caffeine, excess alcohol and some pharmaceuticals; worrying; stressing; or over-exercising. Sadly in today's world, we also see an increase of PTSD in both military and civilian populations (which is a chronic Fight or Flight situation).

The longer Fight or Flight remains, the tougher it is to get back into a parasympathetic state. Our bodies need a balance of both states to be healthy.

Fortunately, several proven methods can help us bring balance when applied consistently.

Donna Eden's triple warmer stress reduction technique¹ is a powerful method and takes only moments. Using it regularly can help address emotional eating and Donna recommends² having support and guidance as you move through this phase.

Mindful Yoga Therapy teaches a number of breathing and meditation techniques³ along with yoga practices. What is most effective, however, is a guided relaxation called Yoga Nidra. If you scroll to the very bottom of the tools page⁴ on their website, you will find a free, downloadable recording. Practiced on a daily basis, this has been shown to reduce

stress and increase sleep significantly in veterans with PTSD.

Nick Ortner's Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) or tapping⁵ has been used by over 1,000,000 people through his free online event the Tapping World Summit.⁶

So, if you are challenged by extra pounds and feel like you just cannot get rid of them, perhaps looking at the stressors in your life and finding ways to release them will be helpful. All of these techniques require consistent practice—daily if possible. Having dependable techniques will empower you and help you to negotiate stressful situations. Use them regularly and you can let go of stress and let go of those pesky pounds. 🍋



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