

**UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE**  
**DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND GERIATRIC MEDICINE**

Written by Nancy Koppersmith RD,MS,LD,CDE and Cynthia Kennedy MS,RD,LD  
Edited and designed by Heather Dodds  
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## Perils of Stress Eating, Snacks, and Soft Drinks



The scene: you are stressed! Before you know it, there is food in your mouth! How did that food get there?

**You are not hungry!**

You know you shouldn't be eating the food! All of a sudden, you feel guilty, angry at yourself, and you want to eat more, even though you know you shouldn't!

**Meanwhile the calories are adding up!**

This situation happens over and over in the lives of many people. The reason why people eat when stressed is complex but stress eating can be stopped. First we need to become aware that we are doing it.

**Eating will not:**

- Pay the bills
- Make a problem better
- Save a relationship
- Solve any problem except hunger

**However, stress eating can cause weight gain!**

This can lead to more stress! Don't get trapped in the stress eating cycle, get relief some other way. Call a friend, join a support group, read a book, or get help from a counselor who specializes in the stress eating cycle.

If snacking is a problem for you, the more you learn to manage your snacking, the easier it will be to manage your health and weight. Avoid temptations by planning ahead. Stay focused on living a life that is healthiest for you.

**MY GOALS:**

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### STOP STRESS EATING

Before you eat anything, ask yourself: am I *really* hungry?

- If the answer is yes, go ahead and eat.
- If the answer is no, *do not eat!* Find something else to do, like taking a walk, working on a hobby, cleaning, or talking.

If you find yourself in the process of eating, STOP, calm down and try to figure out what is wrong instead of eating.

Remember, eating will not control the stress around you. In fact, it will add to your stress! Instead of eating, try doing something else with the problem that is causing the stress!



## Perils of Stress Eating, Snacks, and Soft Drinks

### SNACKS—SOLID AND LIQUID

Mindless snacking and drinking sugared beverages can add unnecessary calories and cause what seems like overnight weight gain! Here are some day-to-day temptations to avoid:

- Vending machines
- Leftovers in the refrigerator
- Goodies being passed around the office
- Tasting food while cooking a meal
- Drinking a caffeinated soft drink in the car to avoid getting sleepy as we drive
- Using food as a "crutch"
- Munching while watching TV, using the computer or playing a videogame

### TEMPTING SNACK SITUATIONS

- At work, food is either there or brought in for a meal. We can be tempted to eat before even thinking about our hunger because the sights and smells are hard to resist.
- Grocery stores often have candy bars, soft drinks, and cookies on sale, and the price is too good.
- TV food commercials can be so tempting that we are mindlessly led to the kitchen to reach for the first available food or drink.
- Vending machines are everywhere and we are tempted again.
- Fast food signs on the road tempt us to pull in and get a quick drink or bite to eat.
- Banks and restaurants often have pieces of candy and since they are free, we help ourselves.
- Bad news—before we know it, food or drink is in our mouth!

### AVOIDING THE PERILS

- Eat meals at regular times every day and plan ahead for snacks by packing them from home.
- Have plenty of water, diet soft drinks, sugar-free iced tea or other sugar-free beverages available to drink, rather than drinks with sugar added.
- Don't skip a meal or two to allow you to eat more at a party or gathering; your hunger may be so huge that you will not be able to control portion size. Instead, if hungry, eat a healthy snack before going to a gathering so you will have control over how much you choose to eat.
- Pack your lunch so you know ahead of time what you will be having and you can eat it, or part of it, instead of being tempted by foods that are brought in.
- Take up a hobby such as working on a puzzle, knitting, sewing, or crocheting while watching television so you have something to do with your hands besides eat!
- Instead of eating at the gas station, get out of the car and take a short walk to energize you for the rest of the trip.