

# BREAK THE STRESS-EATING CYCLE

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**Has this ever happened to you: You are using your meal plan and keeping your blood glucose levels in the target range. Just when you feel you have it all under control, something happens to stress you out. Almost without thinking, you reach for your favorite comfort food.**

You feel better for a while, but then your blood glucose levels go up. So now you feel tired, guilty and even more stressed. You can break this stress-eating cycle. Instead of getting down on yourself or thinking there is nothing you can do to change, you can learn to handle stress in a new way.

## FOOD AND STRESS

There is nothing wrong with eating during times of stress—the problem is what you eat. Most people don't choose carrots and celery as a way to ease stress. It's much more likely that you'll reach for comfort foods that are often high in carbs, fat and calories, such as potato chips, cookies and ice cream. The foods that you find comforting often go back many years, maybe even to childhood. It can be a tough cycle to break, but by learning more about yourself and making a plan, you can do it.

## DID IT HELP?

The first thing to do is to think about why you use

food and how well it is working for you. Think back to when you last ate due to stress. Many people find that food is only a short-term solution. It does not really fix the problem or make the stress go away. In fact, you may feel more stressed.

One idea is to avoid people or things that are stressful as often as you can. It takes time to feel good about saying "No," but it may help to remember that it is in your best interest. And you will be more help to others if you are in better health. But even if you can't get rid of or control the things you find stressful, you do have a choice about how you handle it.

## MAKE A PLAN

One of the reasons people eat when they are stressed is that comfort foods are often not part of their daily meal plan. They end up craving those foods and during stressful times, they reach for them because they feel they deserve it. A way to lessen those cravings is to have small portions of comfort foods routinely so they are less of a treat. A dietitian can help you learn how to fit favorite foods into your meal plan.

There are lots of tips for handling stress, but it can be hard to remember these ideas when you are in the middle of a tough situation. One thought is to make a plan when you are not stressed.

Being ready for stress with a list of things you know will work or want to try can make it easier to use these tips when you need them. Think of it as reaching for your list instead of a cookie.

Stress is part of life. So having a plan in place just makes sense. It can help you break the stress-eating cycle and help you feel more in charge of your diabetes and your life.

## ASK YOURSELF

- Did eating help?
- Did I feel better or worse?
- If I felt better, for how long?
- Did eating cause additional stress or make it go away?
- What could I do instead?

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## TIPS FOR MANAGING STRESS

- 1 Avoid or get rid of what's causing it.
- 2 Change your belief about it.
- 3 Learn new ways to deal with it.
- 4 Take a walk.
- 5 Talk with a good listener.
- 6 Write down your feelings.
- 7 Pray and/or meditate.