



Stress Causes People to SuperSize

July 2007 | Stress Causing People to "Super Size"

By Georgianna Donadio, D.C., M.Sc., Ph.D.

It is currently reported that two out of three adults is either overweight or obese, and the numbers continue to climb. As a result, statistics demonstrate that a significant portion of our population is being diagnosed with chronic conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease. Even more shocking is that we are experiencing these conditions at earlier ages than previously reported. It is not unusual today, to hear about a young person in their 20's diagnosed with mature onset diabetes, normally developed during middle-age.

On May 7, 2004, a controversial and award-winning movie aimed at exploring the obesity epidemic hit theatres. In "*Super Size Me*," a tongue-in-cheek look at the legal, financial and physical costs of our hunger for fast food, filmmaker Morgan Spurlock explores the horrors of school lunch programs, declining health education and physical education classes, food addictions and the extreme measures people take to lose weight. As a centerpiece of the film, Spurlock puts his own body on the line, living on nothing but McDonald's for 30 days following three rules:

- 1) Eat only what is available over the counter
- 2) No supersizing unless offered
- 3) Consume every item on the menu at least once

In the end, Spurlock has a weight gain of 24 pounds and experiences harrowing visits to the doctor. The issues that are explored in "*Super Size Me*" beg the question, what has changed in our environment to cause this obesity problem to reach epidemic proportions? Furthermore, what is causing people to overeat as we do? A groundbreaking study, reported in 2003 by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, found that between 1977 and 1996, portion sizes for key food groups grew markedly in the United States, not only at fast-food restaurants but also in homes and at conventional restaurants. In particular, portion sizes for salty and sugary foods, essentially, "comfort foods" experienced the most dramatic portion size increases. For example, the USDA's recommended serving size for a cookie is half an ounce, while the average cookie sold in restaurants was found to be 700% larger.

The by-products of our affluent American society, envied by many around the world, have a definite dark side, our obesity rate, for starters. In a culture where more is better and disposable income is abundant, when it comes to eating we have developed a “more food, more conveniently and more often” attitude.

Causes of Stress

Prior to the early 1970's, the majority of family units were structured as a one wage earner household where the male worked and the female stayed at home, taking care of the house and family. Driven largely by social and socio-economic factors, all of that has changed. Now, the overwhelming majority of families include both parents working and we find ourselves on a treadmill of more work, more responsibilities, more demands and non-stop scheduling that has many of us in a state of physical and, at times, emotional exhaustion.

Added to the mix is our competitive culture, which often leads to isolation or a “them against us” thinking. Isolation of this nature causes additional “hidden” stress. A Hindu Vendata truth is that “the whole world is one family”. It is said that there is only one disease, the disease of separateness; separating oneself from the awareness that as members of the human family, we are one living organism. The drama created by a “one-up” or “one-down” dynamic, that we find in competitive societies, can lead to the exhaustion and the psychosocial behavioral issues which can contribute to overeating.

Understanding Exhaustion and its' Effect on Obesity

The tipping point at which our bodies can no longer compensate or adapt from the stress it is under, is based in large part on the threshold of nutritional competency and the state of integrity of our nervous system. When our central nervous system, which governs every cell in our body and makes life possible, is not working efficiently, we have a decrease in bodily function and the ability to adapt to the world we live in. Chronic Fatigue Syndromes, CFS, are rampant in our culture today and growing at an alarming rate because of the over stimulation and increased demands placed on our nervous systems. Add to this inadequate nutrition and a decreased ability of our bodies to digest and absorb properly because of the stress, and we see the foundation of the epidemic of chronic diseases being currently reported.

What is so shocking for us, as Americans, is that while we live in one of the most affluent societies ever to exist on earth and have one of the most technologically advanced medical systems we are ranked at approximately twenty-sixth in the world health Olympics. This is not the failure of our medical system, but in fact, the failure to live in our bodies mindfully and respectfully, taking time for rest, proper nutrition, reflection, intimacy with self and others and serving the common good of society. It is this imbalance that leads us to chronic stress, which leads to

physical and, if you will, spiritual exhaustion that is producing the levels of chronic diseases and the rampant obesity we see today.

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