

The New Fat Formula: Sugar + Stress

There's no magic formula to dropping pounds, but take away sugar and stress, and you'll see a huge difference in how you look and feel. Guaranteed.

If you're serious about losing weight, the first thing to do is clean out the sweets. It's where I start with all of my clients. Sugar increases insulin, which in turn triggers your body's storage of fat. The process is simple: you need to eat to get energy – that's how your cells provide you with the fuel to go about your day. When insulin is low, fatty acids come into cells, boost energy and leave as fatty acids. That's healthy. Foods low in sugar don't spike insulin levels, so this fatty acid process works efficiently. But when insulin is high, fatty acids get stored in cells as triglycerides (a type of fat), a process that makes you gain weight. Eating less sugar means lowering your insulin levels, thereby lowering your weight.

Stress also makes you gain and retain weight. Insulin and cortisol are interconnected hormones. When insulin is high, so are your cortisol levels. And when cortisol hikes up, it keeps insulin hiked up, too. Increased cortisol is your body's response to stress, which is why stress can pack on the pounds. There's a myth that when you're stressed out, you eat unhealthy food, make bad choices or stuff yourself for emotional comfort, causing you to gain weight, but that's only part of the story. The reality is that so many people are eating healthy but still can't lose inches. Why? Their cortisol levels are keeping insulin spiked, so it's nearly impossible to shed pounds.

The answer: stress less, weigh less.

3 things you can do in the next 24 hours to feel calmer:

Right now: Breathe. Do a breathing exercise that gets you out of anxiety, worry, or fear and into the present moment. I love this one from Dr. Andrew Weil: inhale slowly for four counts, hold your breath for four counts, then exhale slowly for eight counts. Repeat three times whenever you need to clear your thoughts or just before bed to help you drift off to sleep.

Today: Organize. Clutter and chaos can make you feel overwhelmed and stressed out. Create a To Do list based on how you like to work – by priority, by ease, by due date – to streamline your day and give you a sense of control. Check them off when completed. When you juggle your obligations in your mind, they never turn off which increases anxiety and the feeling like they'll never get done.

Tonight: Sleep. Get at least seven hours of shut-eye each night. Anything less and you'll begin to compromise your system, which lowers productivity, focus, memory, concentration and hormones related to hunger satiety. At the same time, fatigue, irritability and moodiness increase. And yep, you guessed it, all that adds to even more stress.