

# **Stress, Sleep, and Weight Gain**

**By**

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Many parents who are experiencing chronic stress also find they experience significant weight problems. We all know what we are supposed to do about that – eat less and exercise more. Then there's always that awful advice of "just stop eating when you are full" oh like you never thought of that yourself?

Of course leaving the house to go for a walk or go to the gym isn't quite so easy if you think junior might set a fire while you are gone. And, taking the time to measure calories and even join a weight support group is also hard to do when your day is packed with unpredictable crisis and appointments with therapists and interventionists and social workers etc. And, even though you do stop eating when you're full, you still find you have a large appetite and you don't get full.

The obstacles to weight gain for Hazardous Parenting aren't an excuse – they are part of the reality for some of us. Now, scientists are finding that there is a strong relationship between lack of sleep and weight gain.

For many of you who are engaged in a Hazardous Parenting lifestyle, chronic lack of sleep is just part of the package. You can't sleep well because of the chronic stress which either prevents you from falling asleep or wakes you up at 3 a.m.

Scientists have investigated the link between sleep and appetite and here are some of their findings. SR Patel and his group (check out <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16914506>) followed 68,000+ women for 16 years, and investigated whether their weight gain (an indicator of appetite) during the study was correlated with the number of hours they slept each night. And they found that there was a strong correlation. The women who slept less than 5 hours a night had the

greatest weight gain, while the women who slept 7-8 hours per night maintained their weight throughout the 16 year study.

Another group of scientists headed by Shahrad Thahiri (check out <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC535701>) looked at whether sleep deprivation affected the hormones that regulate appetite. One of their hormones of interest is ghrelin. Ghrelin is a hormone released by the stomach that stimulates the appetite centers in the brain. The other appetite hormone is leptin, which is produced by our fat cells and has the exact opposite effect that ghrelin has on appetite. That is, ghrelin creates the urge to eat and leptin makes us feel full.

For many years I took great pride in not sleeping more than 4 or 5 hours a night – and great shame in failing at every diet I tried. I couldn't sleep – that was a luxury that I didn't have. And, I've paid for it with obesity and all the health problems that go with that.

I'm not making excuses for myself – I'll take full responsibility for every bit of food that goes into my mouth. But, now that I have this information I'm making different choices and different priorities.

I've learned how to shut off the stress and to stay asleep no matter what is going on. I use biofeedback breathing and eft tapping to get to let of all the worries and to fall asleep. If I wake up at 3 a.m. I use the same techniques to go back to sleep.

I've learned that it doesn't matter what is going on my Hazardous Parenting life – I can take care of my well being. I can help you learn to do that too.

Remember – you're entitled to a better day.