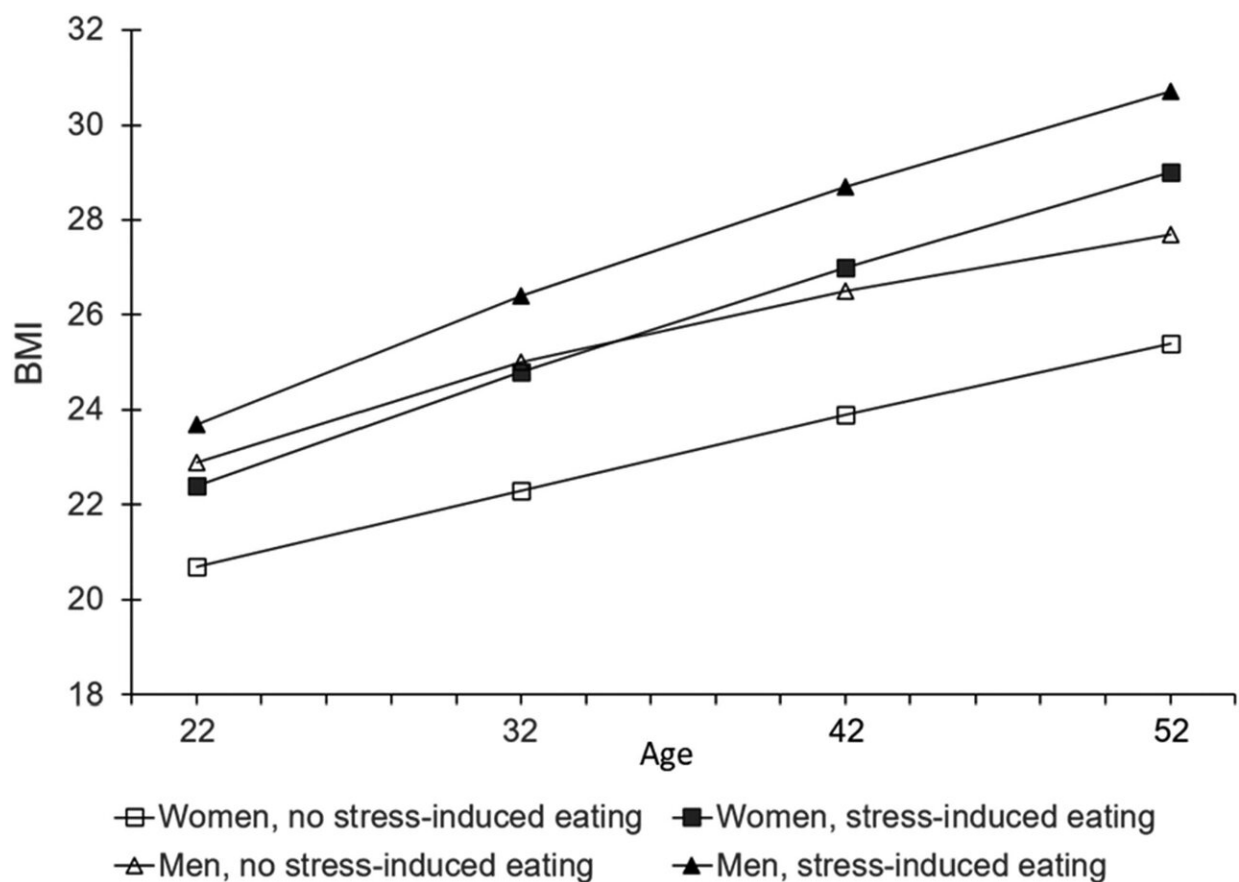


Managing stress with food and alcohol consumption connected with faster lifelong weight gain

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BMI trajectories predicted by number of follow-ups (0–4) in which stress-induced eating was reported. No stress-induced eating = stress-induced eating reported in none of the follow-ups; stress-induced eating = stress-induced eating reported in three of the follow-ups. Credit: *Psychology & Health* (2023). DOI: 10.1080/08870446.2023.2192240

Food and alcohol consumption as means of easing stress are linked with body weight in both the long, and short terms. These are among the results of Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare's (THL) follow-up study examining how common eating and alcohol use are as stress management methods for men and women, and their connections with body weight and how it develops over a 30-year period.

Eating as a means of [stress](#) management correlates with higher [body weight](#), and as a long-term stress management tool, it is linked with faster weight gain in adulthood. The correlation is clear both for women and men.

Alcohol consumption as a coping method for stress relates to higher weight in middle-age. Alcohol in stress management is also connected with faster weight gain among adult men but not with women.

"The emergence of a connection only with men might derive from the fact that men consume larger amounts of alcohol at one time and drink beverages with a higher energy content," observes Elena Rosenqvist, a doctoral researcher at THL and the University of Helsinki.

Eating is a common stress management method for women, while alcohol is favored by young men

Nearly half of all women (41–55%) exhibit some stress-related eating in adulthood, and for women, eating as a means of stress management was considerably more common than among men. One possible reason for this could be the greater cultural pressures placed on women to reduce weight, as dieting has been seen as a possible cause of stress eating. Stress eating, and reporting it, can also be socially more acceptable for

women.

Meanwhile, men aged 22–32 used alcohol more frequently than women as means of stress management, but after this, stress-related use of alcohol was equally common among men and women.

"Cultural changes in the use of alcohol by the two genders in the past 30 years may have affected the narrowing of differences in the follow-up," Rosenqvist says.

"Another possible explanation for the difference is that becoming a parent often has a greater effect on drinking by women than by men."

Stress management methods significant for weight management

As stress-related eating and [alcohol use](#) can have long-term effects on weight, it is important to react to them at an early stage. Developing suitable stress management methods plays an important role in preventing obesity.

Stress eating seems to have more consistent links with weight than stress-related [alcohol consumption](#). As stress eating is common especially among women, identifying women's stress eating is important in interventions related to weight control.

Eating and alcohol use in [stress management](#) have not previously been studied in parallel. The study is part of the Stress, development and [mental health](#) (TAM) project, a follow-up study in which people in one age cohort in Tampere have been monitored through questionnaires since 1983 at the ages of 16, 22, 32, 42, and 52.

The findings are published in the journal *Psychology & Health*.

More information: Elena Rosenqvist et al, Stress-induced eating and drinking and their associations with weight among women and men during 30-year follow-up, *Psychology & Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/08870446.2023.2192240](https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2023.2192240)

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