ECO: stress in children impacts hormones, diet, adiposity
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(HealthDay)—For children, stress is associated with poorer diet, which stimulates adiposity, according to a study presented at the annual European Congress on Obesity, held from May 28 to 31 in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Nathalie Michels, Ph.D., from Ghent University in Belgium, and colleagues conducted a two-year longitudinal study to examine the relation between stress, diet, and adiposity in 312 Belgian children (aged 5 to 12 years). They measured stress data, including negative events, problem behavior, and negative emotions; food consumption; psychological eating behavior; and adiposity.

The researchers found that more sweet food consumption, emotional eating, external eating, and restrained eating were reported by children with a high stress score. Stress was found to increase adiposity only for children with high sweet food intake and cortisol. There was a correlation between high cortisol and an unhealthy diet, especially sweet foods. In girls, high cortisol correlated with higher leptin levels.

"The associations of cortisol with leptin and diet support the theory of cortisol-induced comfort food preference," Michels said in a statement. "Indeed children's stress makes their diet less healthy, which stimulates increases in body fat. This creates potential for a multi-part obesity prevention program, targeting stress (including coping skills) and lifestyle factors (e.g., diet) together."

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