**Stressed at work? It could be making you FAT: Those exposed to long-term pressure reach out for comfort foods due to high levels of the hormone cortisol**

* **Researchers examined hair samples from more than 2,500 men and women**
* **They found those who weighed more had higher levels of a stress hormone**
* **While the reverse was also proved to be true, the British scientists discovered**
* **They believe high levels of cortisol causes people to reach for comfort foods**

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**PUBLISHED:** 12:13, 23 February 2017 | **UPDATED:** 12:14, 23 February 2017

Long term stress may make you obese, scientists warn.

Those exposed to several months of work pressure weigh more than their relaxed colleagues, a study suggests.

Having high levels of cortisol - dubbed the stress hormone - causes people to reach out for comfort foods, experts believe.

And those products high in fat, sugar and calories are damaging their waistlines.

While the hormone also determines where fat is stored in someone, with those stressed more likely to get flab around their stomachs.

Those exposed to several months of work pressure weigh more than their relaxed colleagues, a new study suggests

Researchers from University College London examined hair samples of 2,527 men and women.

All participants were over the age of 54 and were followed over a four-year period.

They took a 2cm long hair sample - the equivalent of two months of growth - as close as possible to each person's scalps.

Accumulated levels of cortisol - which regulates many changes in the body including blood sugar levels, immune responses and inflammation - were also taken.

They found people with higher levels of the hormone in their hair tended to have larger waist circumference measurements.

While they were also heavier and had a higher body mass index, according to the researchers.

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Having high levels of cortisol - dubbed the stress hormone - causes people to reach out for comfort foods, experts believe

Those classified as obese also had particularly high levels of cortisol, the study published in the journal Obesity found.

Study author Dr Sarah Jackson said: 'These results provide consistent evidence that chronic stress is associated with higher levels of obesity.

'People who had higher hair cortisol levels also tended to have larger waist measurements, which is important because carrying excess fat around the abdomen is a risk factor for heart disease, diabetes, and premature death.

'Hair cortisol is a relatively new measure which offers a suitable and easily obtainable method for assessing chronically high levels of cortisol concentrations in weight research and may therefore aid in further advancing understanding in this area.'

But she added that the participants were older and their levels of cortisol may differ to younger adults.

It is not currently known whether chronically elevated cortisol levels are a cause or a consequence of obesity.

More research is needed and if causation is proved, then targeting cortisol levels may offer a new method for treating obesity.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-4252544/Stressed-work-making-FAT.html#ixzz4eJKbftj9> 