

Balance 365 Episode 154 Transcript

ANNIE BREES (INTRO)

Welcome to Balance365 Life Radio, a podcast that delivers honest conversations about food, fitness, weight, and wellness. I'm your host Annie Brees along with co-founder Jennifer Campbell. Together we have a team of personal trainers and nutritionists who coach 1000s of women daily and are on a mission to help women feel happy, healthy, and confident in their bodies on their own terms. Join us here every week as we discuss hot topics pertaining to our physical, mental, and emotional well being with amazing guests. Enjoy.

ANNIE

Hello, my friends, welcome back to Balance365 Life Radio. Today, we're going to be teaching you about stress and weight gain. We live in a culture obsessed with food, whether it's talking about carbs, calories or chemicals, it's all very stressful, wouldn't you say? At Balance365 we believe there are bigger foundational issues that a lot of people are totally missing that are wreaking havoc on their health and their ability to lose or maintain their weight. We hope this podcast helps you zoom out and reprioritize what you consider healthy habits. And before we begin, I want to remind you that our coaching program is open again on March 12, just over one month away. If you missed joining last time, or you're ready to join, get your name on the waitlist, we can only accept a limited number of people and those on the waitlist have priority access to those slots. And you can find the link in our show notes. Enjoy.

ANNIE

Jen, Do you ever feel stressed?

JEN CAMPBELL

Yes, I do.

ANNIE

[Laughs] I think that's a pretty common experience, right? To feel stress.

JEN

Yeah, absolutely.

ANNIE

And today, we're talking about how it affects your weight. Right? Which is something that I think maybe people have drawn the connection to, but maybe don't understand why it's such an important element to weight loss because as we've talked about many times before, the diet industry has people hyper-focused on food, and it's food, food, food, food, maybe a little bit of workouts, but mostly food, but we talk a lot about stress in Balance365.

JEN

We do. And in this podcast, we're actually going to say okay, we know that you know it's important, but no, like, really. It's important. [Laughs]

ANNIE

But really, it's important. So let's start out with like what is stress?

JEN

Stress is how your body responds to a change, either physically, mentally, or emotionally.

ANNIE

Mm-hmm. So as a personal trainer, we actually talk about as exercise as a stress.

JEN

Yeah.

ANNIE

Right? On your body.

JEN

Exercise is a stress to your body.

ANNIE

And, in that context, it can be a positive thing, it can be a good thing, we want a certain amount of stress to elicit a change in our body, right?

JEN

Yeah. And so, and most people associate stress as something negative. But there's actually such a thing as not enough stress. And what you want in your life is just the right amount of stress. Right? And that analogy -

ANNIE

Goldilocks.

JEN

Goldilocks. Yeah, and that analogy can be used perfectly with like physical stress and around strength training. If you are challenging enough, yourself enough during workouts, your body isn't gonna respond -

ANNIE

Adapt.

JEN

Right, and adapt. And if you're stressing your body out too much with exercise, then your body's not going to respond well to that either.

ANNIE

So you want just enough.

JEN

You want just enough and then to look at it in like the context of our life and life stress, when you don't have enough stress, you might feel very unmotivated and have a hard time getting going. And just feel kind of lethargic and lazy. But then, of course, I think what's more common with our audience, is that we feel too much stress and we are over-committed, and we have way too many things pulling us in different directions. And that's a very negative experience for us, too, right? Like, we feel very anxious, we can get depressed, we can, and when we have too much stress, we actually are more likely to just kind of shut down.

ANNIE

Right. And this can also be very person-specific, right? How we adapt our tolerance, our response. You know, everything from like, how much you sleep, how, or how little you sleep, how much you eat, how little you eat, anger, sadness, you know, the emotions that can follow stress. Would you say you're good at handling stress, Jen?

JEN

That depends, right? So different people can cope with different amounts and types of stress, and that can change over the course of your life. So some people are more stress-tolerant than others and in different areas. And there's certain circumstances that I can stay very calm, it's a very high-pressure situation. And I find my calm in it, and I can navigate it very well. But that same situation might take a huge toll on my husband, like he's not handling it well at all. But on the flip side, there are situations where my husband can really keep it together, he's calm, cool, he's got this, and I'm losing it, like an example I was thinking about was, when my oldest son was younger, he fell, and he cut his head. And it was a bleeder. And like, I almost fainted. Like, you know, I really didn't handle the situation well, but my husband in those situations, he's just, he can, he handles it. And he's just calm, and it's not stressful for him at all really. People will be - handle - be more stress-tolerant in some areas, not in others. And when I was researching for this podcast, I also learned that there's a genetic connection to how we can handle stress, too, that just genetically, some of us are more stress-tolerant than others, and that's okay. But also, remembering that sometimes our childhood experiences can prepare us better for stress than others, right?

ANNIE

Yeah. And, there's also, I think, so far, in this podcast episode, we've talked about stress as almost it's like, I think, an experience, and then it goes away. And I think we're gonna explore a little bit later in the episode, the idea of chronic stress, prolonged exposures to stress, where it's like this thing that kind of like, chips away at you. And it's just like, it's constantly there. And it's ongoing, and it's like, there's weight on your shoulders. It's not just like this an accident, and

then you experience it, and then it's over. And then it's like, okay, you know, it's done with, it can be something that's more ongoing and chronic, right?

JEN

Yeah, for sure. So a lot of people want to know if they can, like, under the topic of stress management, they're wondering, how can they better manage their stress? And the first thing they go to is, okay, how do I control my stress?

ANNIE

Which, in and of itself can be another thing to stress about? Right?

JEN

Yeah, totally. But, that's not really the right question to ask. The right question is, can you control your stressors? And the second question would be, can you control your response to stress? So stress itself is just, there are stressors in our external world. Or even in our inner world, right? The things we think about, say to ourselves in our heads, and then there's our response to it, that it really encompasses the whole kind of stress response, I guess. And so the answer is, can we control these things, stressors, or our response to stress is: yes, no, and sometimes, right? Like it really depends.

ANNIE

Wow.

JEN

[Laughs]

ANNIE

Wow, Jen. Wow. [Laughs]

JEN

Thank you. So there are external stressors we can't control that are incredibly taxing to a person, like experiencing any kind of discrimination, you know, because of their gender, race, sexual orientation, body size, ability, etc. Then there are things a person can control, I should say, or, has more control over, like, setting boundaries and learning to recognize when they're over-committed and saying no. So for an example, a lot of people get really stressed out around the Christmas holiday season. And what they should probably consider is that they can opt-out of a lot of the things that they commit themselves to over the season, right? So that's where we do have control. And you know, there's going to be many different examples. Then there is our response to try to stress and we can improve this. So this is a skill that we can work on. And we can get better at handling stress. So, you can develop better coping skills, or you can shift your mindset about certain circumstances. And we have actually a whole podcast about that. Three ways to navigate stress, or - I think, is what it's called, but we'll link to it in the show notes because this episode is about stress and weight gain. It's not necessarily how to better handle stress, but we will point you in that direction. And so an example of this is how to better handle

stress is that, so for example, a person might find a toddler having a tantrum, incredibly stressful. But after a few months of developing some different coping skills around it, or even changing their mindset towards tantrums, then having your toddler have a meltdown, it just might barely impact you at all, you might be able to keep rolling. And when you change your response to stress, it totally changes your experience with it. And I know, like for me, I was pretty flatlined. When I had kids like, it was, I found it incredibly stressful. Just the life upheaval, the changes, the lack of sleep. And my sister just kept on rolling. She just like, had a baby. And off she went. And I remember saying to her, like, "Why didn't -" You know, she had children before me, and I remember saying, like, "Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you know?" And she was just experiencing it differently than me. She didn't tell me because she was experiencing it different.

ANNIE

Yeah, what comes to mind for me and you, Jen, is competition. Like, yeah, if you put us in a CrossFit class and compete against each other, I'm guessing Jen, you would be like, stressed out, you'd be like, "Oh, my God," like anxious.

JEN

Yeah, I didn't like CrossFit. [Laughs]

ANNIE

Yeah. And I'm like, "Let's go. Let's do it." Same situation, two different responses. Two different perspectives.

JEN

Yeah. And just you played competitive sports when you were younger, I did not. I pursued solo sports like snowboarding or rock climbing. I didn't like competition. It was, it felt stressful for me. And I guess what I'm saying here is if I wanted to develop that, I could, I could get better at handling competition. I have no plans of it, but I could.

BOTH

[Laugh]

JEN

So, let's get into how stress impacts your weight. And stress in and itself does not cause weight gain, like, you're not like, I'm very stressed today, now I'm heavier. It is, or I'm very stressed today, now I weigh less, right? Because it could go both ways. Stress impacts our behaviors, which in turn, impact our weight.

ANNIE

Mm-hmm.

JEN

And so on the low-stress side, which I know not a lot of people that are listening probably deal with that. But I'm going to tell a story about when I had very low stress and how that impacted me, but on the low-stress side. Remember that some stress is good for you. So think of a person who retires and goes from having to be somewhere five days a week at nine o'clock in the morning to having nowhere to go like most days of the week. And there's actually studies that show that retirement can bring a decline in physical and mental health for some people. And that the result could simply be they are, they kind of, they kind of feel aimless, a lot of people I think feel they lose their identity a bit when they retire. And that might mean eating more, moving less. And that will certainly impact your weight. And my mother in law, she has a great saying, she always says because she's in her 70s, her and her husband, my husband's parents, they're both in their 70s. And they're still working. They got a farm and my husband's dad still goes into work three days a week. And they say you've got to have something to get up for in the morning. That's what they always say, like, "What would we do if we retired? What would we do?" So, and I've always found that kind of inspiring. And I also had a friend share with me a few years ago, her kids were a bit older than mine. We were both home with our kids but her kids were transitioning to school and I had three kids under four. And she told me that if I plan on staying home with my kids while they were young as she did, to have something ready for myself when they go to school because she was feeling the first year her kids were in school full time she was feeling depressed. She felt very aimless. I think she was also having sort of an identity crisis. And she was just very kind of listless and unmotivated that year. And I experienced this one time when my husband took our kids to his parents' last summer.

ANNIE

I remember this.

JEN

And I did nothing for five days. I didn't even leave my house. Oh -

ANNIE

I think you slept. [Laughs]

JEN

[Laughs] Like 18 hours one time. [Laughs]

ANNIE

Yeah.

JEN

And I was like, this feels so gross.

ANNIE

[Laughs]

JEN

And I realized that my kids are such a, like, the demands that they placed on me, the stress that they provide in my life actually provide me with structure. And they get me actually out of the house and around people and doing school pick up and I really, I guess, you know, they're part of my world, this business, my family, and I didn't realize how much structure they provide for me, like, and so I just kind of felt gross after and then what I was thinking, like, "What am I going to, what am I going to do, like, go for a walk? Like what?" So that's where no stress can be detrimental to your health and even your weight, right? Like, whether you're eating more, or if you get depressed and you stop eating. So, just enough stress is good. Like, you want stress.

ANNIE

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

JEN

Yeah.

ANNIE

Let's talk about high stress, though, because I am guessing that's where most -

JEN

Nobody wants to hear about my five day do nothing.

BOTH

[Laugh]

ANNIE

I'm so sorry that you don't have enough stress in your life, Jen. [Laughs]

JEN

It was awful. [Laughs]

ANNIE

We don't feel bad for you.

BOTH

[Laugh]

ANNIE

No, I'm, I'm only teasing. But I would be willing to bet that the majority of people fall on the high-stress side.

JEN

Yeah. So we'll talk about high stress. And I do think that's more common in our audience. And absolutely, it can impact your weight. And studies show that chronic stress is associated with higher body weights. So high stress, again, like a burst of stress is fine. So the example we

used at the beginning was a workout. A workout is stressful to your body. But we would argue that that's a good stress. It's not chronic, ongoing. So when you have chronic, elevated cortisol levels, it will disrupt your hunger and satiety signals, so you will actually feel hungrier, and it will take you longer to feel satisfied. So you'll eat more. You will have cravings, you will likely be doing more emotionally eating. If you emotionally eat. Most of us do from time to time. And likely if you're stressed and you're having cravings, you're not craving a salad. You're craving something high carb, high fat, very calorie-dense, right? You also will likely be moving less. Whether that's because you are zapped for energy, or like for us, I know when I'm very stressed, if you and I have work deadlines, I'm moving less because I'm at my desk for 14 hours, right?

JEN

Yeah, there have been days when I started wearing my Apple Watch, which tracks my steps, and there's been days when I've got up from my desk at 6pm and gotten a whopping like 1000 steps.

BOTH
[Laugh]

JEN
Right.

ANNIE
Like, wow. This personal trainer is pretty sedentary.

JEN
Stress also causes sleep disturbances, which we know are just a vicious cycle into being you know, you're stressed, you can't sleep, not being able to sleep creates more stress. And it just keeps you awake longer hours, which means more time and opportunity to be eating more. And stress actually degrades muscle mass, which I thought was very interesting. And I knew you'd have your eye on that. You like yourself, you like your muscles.

ANNIE
I do like my muscles. I also just want to like take a quick note here that high stress, chronic stress, for a long time I associated, I didn't identify with someone as stressed because I pictured this like Wolf of Wall Street type of like, high demand, high-performance competitive environment, and I was like, "I am a stay at home mom," or you know, like, it didn't align with what I thought of stress. But people can feel stress over like relationships, finances. Their own, just mental health can be a cause of stress. It can be a job, regardless of how demanding it is. So it can be, it can be really open to interpretation of what you find stressful, right?

JEN
Totally. So that's a really important point. Because back in the old days, hunting and gathering days, our stress was more physical, right? Like, there were predators, and there were famines and everything like that. We're now actually in today's modern world, there's a lot more mental

stress than physical stress, right? But it's still impacting us. It's still impacting our bodies, right? Like we're still having a stress response, even though we're not fighting saber-toothed tigers, or whatever we used to fight. [Laughs]

ANNIE

But physiologically, we don't know the difference, right? It's still, it still affects us the same.

JEN

Yeah. Yes. Now, what I want to talk about here is that chronic high stress can not just lead to weight gain, it can lead to a change in our body composition. So just the shape of our body and where we store fat. And stress is highly correlated with visceral fat levels, which is our abdominal fat. So that would be like if your body shape was more like an apple instead of a pear kind of thing. Or you're thinking of like the classic, typical, like beer belly as people call it, that kind of thing. And that would be abdominal, the abdominal body fat. And we've talked about this in other podcasts, I won't dive into it. But that's actually the type of body fat that can have a negative impact on your health. Because it's fat that is stored around your internal organs and can affect hormone function and puts people at risk for diseases like type two diabetes, heart disease, breast cancer, among other things.

ANNIE

Mm-hmm.

JEN

Yeah. And it's not that you've again, you don't feel stress, and then just your shape just changes. It'll be a combination of things that will be how the stress is impacting your behaviors. So your eating and your body composition is changing.

ANNIE

Right, right. Eating and drinking. I mean, I think that's a common response, or attempt to cope with stress can be drug and alcohol use, which obviously can affect your body composition as well.

JEN

Yeah. And we, I know, we've had Traci Mann on this podcast. She runs the Eating Lab. She's an eating psychologist at the University of Minnesota. And she talks about this in her book *Secrets From the Eating Lab*, about how cortisol like, being chronically stressed, like cortisol actually makes energy available to us in the form of glucose. Because your body is going, "We're in a high-stress situation. I'm going to make some energy available, because we got to run from that saber-toothed tiger." But we aren't running. Right? It's 2021. We are not running from saber-toothed tigers. And so actually, that energy that is being made available to us isn't being used. And so it's being stored as belly fat.

ANNIE

Mm-hmm.

JEN
Yeah.

ANNIE
So what's the big takeaway here, Jen?

JEN
The big takeaway? [Laughs]

ANNIE
Well, I'm thinking, you know, okay, listeners are like, "Okay, I like, I understand that. Yeah, stress can impact," again, because so many people are focused, who want weight loss, are focused on nutrition, right?

JEN
Yeah.

ANNIE
And we're over here saying, "Okay, there's some other elements to your lifestyle that affect your nutritional behaviors."

JEN
Yeah, so it's understanding how stress impacts our body and leads to either body composition changes or weight gain. And also understanding that this emphasis we've put on finding the perfect diet for weight loss in our culture is actually very, also very stressful to us, right? It's also very stressful to our bodies, like, we have a physiological response to extreme restrictive dieting. Right? So just understanding that you're actually adding to the likelihood of you developing binge eating habits, emotional eating habits, eating in a caloric surplus, not a deficit. Right? So you're actually working, it's like swimming upstream.

ANNIE
Yeah.

JEN
You're working against your body, not with it. And what we would argue here at Balance365, is that there's some foundational aspects of our lifestyle that need to be addressed. As we're on this journey, right?

ANNIE
Yep. This feels very similar to the way in which we talk about sleep, which we did on the podcast about sleep as well. It's like, so many people are skipping over stress management, coping skills with stress, sleep management, improving sleep, and just jumping right to what they're eating and how much they're eating and when they're eating and these supplements and these

workouts, and it's like, "Hey, let's walk it back a few steps and make sure we're looking at these, too."

JEN

Yeah, so we need to look at the stressors we have in our lives. And our response to stress. And again, we'll link to the whole podcast of how you can kind of further break that down. The other thing for anyone listening, especially the professionals, health and wellness professionals listening, is to actually understand how stress impacts your health. And if you are passionate about health and wellness, to understand how discrimination or any kind of oppression like poverty impacts people, right? And that's why we need the bigger systematic changes. Because those are the types of stressors that you can't escape from.

ANNIE

Mm-hmm. Absolutely. So hopefully, you understand after listening, that stress can affect your weight. And if you are looking for weight loss, and not addressing your stress, and your sleep, I'll throw that in there. You might be skipping some big rocks.

JEN

Yes, some very big rocks, and in our experience with the 1000s of women that we've worked with, those who are losing weight in a sustainable way are working on their whole self at the same time, right? A big, big part of that is learning to manage stress better, making sure they have just the right amount

ANNIE

Goldilocks your stress. [Laughs]

JEN

Goldilocks your stress.

ANNIE

Not too little. Not too much. Just right.

JEN

Just right.

ANNIE BREES

Yeah. All right. Thank you, Jen. That was helpful.

JEN

Thank you.

ANNIE

Appreciate it. We'll talk soon. Okay?

JEN

Bye-bye.

ANNIE (OUTRO)

Hey, everyone, if your mind has been blown while listening to this podcast, just wait until you work with us. Let us help you level up your health and wellness habits and your life inside Balance365 coaching. Head on over to balance365.co to join coaching.