

Couple Chub

Why love can lead to flab

I've been asked numerous times to give my professional opinion regarding why couples often gain weight together. I'm aware that my attempts to answer this question might land me in hot water, but I'm willing to gamble.

When faced with the challenging decision of, "Hmm, do I go to the gym, or get naked with my sweetie?" I've more often chosen the latter—let's not fib. I've never received a trip to the rock gym in lieu of chocolates for Valentine's Day—and wisely so. Gathering food and eating together is a primal urge.

Furthermore, the weather seems to play a huge role in a couple's inactivity. I personally hate to exercise in the cold. The words "Hey honey, it's 30 degrees, let's go for a walk!" will never come out of my mouth.

Finally, the temptation to spend days cuddling in bed coupled with countless romantic dinners might leave folks feeling bloated or out of shape; as a result, they will probably feel less physical. Inactivity will make you tired. A body in motion stays in motion. A body on the couch, well, stays on the couch.

So let's say, in addition to the above, you have a stressful job that keeps you glued to your desk all day. This is (at least) eight hours a day that you spend clenching your jaw and holding still. The job-related stress and the need for cash make people do all sorts of negative negotiating, for time and for rest. While the need for cash is valid, so is the need for prioritizing movement.



Dear Ethel
BY MARIA CALLAHAN

Make your life more active regardless of your circumstances!

DEAR ETHEL:

I am 32 and failing at staying within 10 pounds of my college weight. My new girlfriend is a chef, but she swears she's not sneaking me extra calories. To counteract some of the job stress that I encounter daily, I exercise five to six days a week. I've been doing this for years, but I seem to be gaining weight around my middle and losing muscle tone in my arms. I do 30 to 40 minutes of stationary bike cardio five to six days a week at lunchtime and attend a boxing class two nights a week. Please have a look at my food and exercise journal and tell me what I should do.

You sound very disciplined. Try some of my suggestions, and give yourself three to four weeks to see

change. Be patient. Remember that it's as easy to reach a plateau with diet as it is with exercise. Adaptation is your body's way of being efficient. Take away the activities

or dietary changes that keep you adapting positively, and you might end up with weight gain or no new muscle. I know it's hard to keep the faith about exercise and diet when you believe you're already doing everything you're supposed to.

Here are some tips:

- Vary the time of day you exercise.
- Incorporate 15 minutes of stretching into your workout two to three times a week.
- Work your arms when you ride the stationary bike, incorporate interval training, or try another form of cardio. Have you taken any time off from exercise in the past few months? Time off can support muscle mass by giving the tissue ample time to regrow.
- Try one week away from the gym every three months; you'd be surprised at how the aches, pains and exercise boredom can ease up.

You eat the same thing almost every day. Throw something new into the equation; eat less often or smaller meals more often. Your journal told me that you have a candy jar at work. Bypass it, and bring healthy snacks with you.

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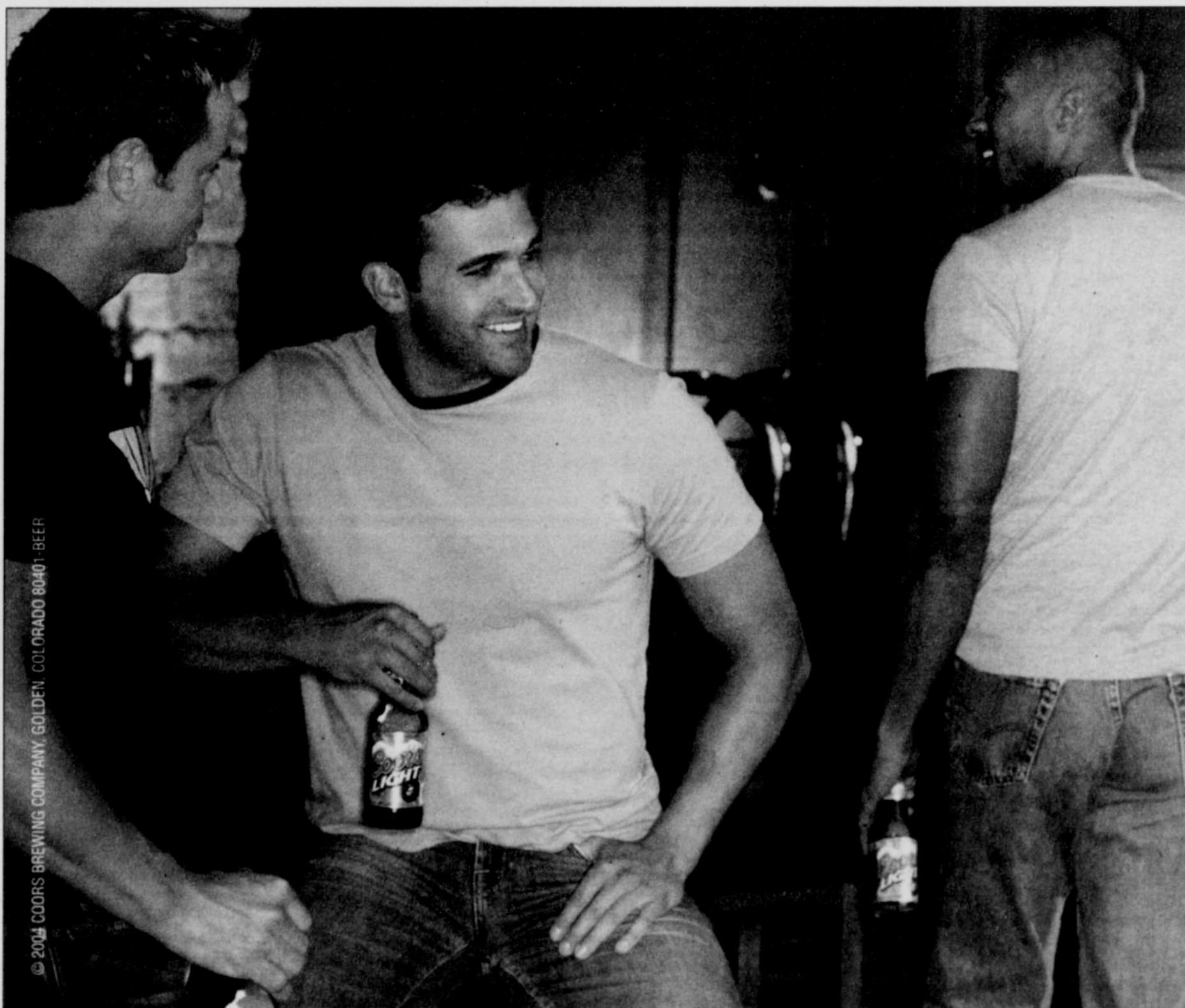
Stress itself can be a contributor to weight gain. A stressful life or too much exercise can elevate your cortisol levels, which might affect your weight. Cortisol is a "catabolic" or muscle-wasting hormone—the

opposite of a muscle-building hormone. While cortisol production in and of itself is not a bad thing, having an elevated level of cortisol might prevent your muscles from recovering at an optimal rate. Note: Cortisol-blocking supplements do not work.

Too much cardio can have a "smoothing" effect on muscle, which is great for weight loss but not for maintaining muscle mass. It's estimated that for each decade after the age of 25, 3 percent to 5 percent of muscle mass is lost (likely compounded by a less active lifestyle). As you get older, you have to work a little harder and heavier with weights to get that muscle tone back. It can be done!

Your routine isn't working for you anymore, so keeping a journal for a personal trainer was wise. Consultations with a trainer are often cheaper than a training session. Stick with it! **jo**

Information in this column should not be used in place of advice from a licensed health care professional. If you have a health or fitness question, e-mail DEAR ETHEL at maria@etheldiesels.com or visit www.etheldiesels.com.



downtown, portland [1:07 a.m.]

hot guy.
Cold Coors Light.®



Now's the time.

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