



HOT AND HEAVY

How To Avoid Relationship Weight Gain

By Felicia S. Levine

My guy loves to feed me. He whips up late-night meals from scratch with the dexterity of an Iron Chef, complete with warm breads and rich side dishes (his Pasta Pomodoro is ridiculous). He keeps his freezer stocked with my favorite ice cream and wine is always at the ready. Being domestically challenged, I find his culinary prowess both attractive and incredibly satisfying.

But he needs to stop now. He's making me fat.

Seriously.

Before we met, my meals consisted of Egg Beaters or frozen dinners hastily consumed between work-

outs. Since we began dating almost a year ago, the disciplined workouts have decreased and the leisurely movie nights have increased – as has my waistline. My clothes have grown incrementally (and exponentially) tighter. Some no longer fit. Not only do I eat muffin-tops – I have one. I think my cholesterol is higher, too. I dare not step on the scale.

Sigh. I miss my skinny jeans the most.

I've tried talking to him about it. Our last conversation went something like this:

Me: *"Oh my God – my pants don't fit anymore! I need to start eating better. Can you support me on this?"*

My boyfriend: *"But you look great. I hope you're not doing this for me."*

Me: *"I'm not – I'm doing it for me."*

My boyfriend: *"OK, of course I'll support you."*

He baked me brownies the next morning.

Bastard.

Perhaps I need to take a little responsibility. He didn't *make* me eat the brownies, the fries – he wasn't even there for the pizza. Apparently, my problem is part of a universal phenomenon I call "Chubby Hubby Syndrome," where people in re-

lationships pile on the pounds. According to a Cornell University study, married couples, and newlyweds in particular, are more prone to significant weight gain than singles.

Brings new meaning to the phrase "love handles."

It makes sense. As a single person, you're at the top of your game – hitting the weights, staying fit and looking for love. But when you enter a new relationship, you want to spend every minute with that person. The gym – and pretty much everything else – becomes secondary to sneaking in some quality time. Snuggling trumps the StairMaster. Weeks turn into months...



and even years. You no longer feel the need to impress your partner with a hard body. It's liberating. Then one day you look in the mirror and a Jenny Craig "Before" photo is staring back.

It's a situation Deerfield Beach therapist Lori Sarvis has encountered in her practice. "The clients I've seen gain about 15 pounds on average, but usually not during the first three months," she explains. "At that time they're still watching themselves because they want to look good for that person. But after that, they stop going out dancing and being active. They stay home and watch TV, and there's always a higher caloric intake when watching TV."

Marathon make-out sessions no longer disrupt your favorite shows, either. Instead, what Sarvis calls "Pregnant-Lady-Granny-Underpants" mode kicks in. "When a couple sits around watching TV, the woman's not wearing a tight

little skirt. She's wearing stretchy sweat pants. Those are the worst, not only because they're not sexy, but because you're not aware of the amount of food you're eating."

Another factor: Partners often pick up each other's "bad" habits. *Lisa, a healthy eater and yoga fanatic, was dating *Mark, a charming couch potato. Infatuated with Mark, Lisa began foregoing her Saturday morning exercise classes to sleep late in his arms, after which they'd spend the day watching movies, eating pizza and drinking beer. "It was really fun for a while," Lisa recalls. "But then I started to gain weight and feel gross. I tried to break the routine, but Mark became offended. He wouldn't compromise – I think he actually wanted me to gain weight! We eventually broke up."

Indeed, someone with low self-esteem may sabotage the other's self-improvement efforts. "One partner undermines the other's diet for fear

that if he or she loses weight, they'll leave," Sarvis explains. "I had a couple where the husband kept bringing home ice cream, and then complaining that his wife gained 25 pounds. On one hand, he wanted her to look the way she did when he married her. On the other hand, he didn't want other men looking at her."

When the wife broached the subject, Sarvis explains, "He said, 'I love you and I know it's your favorite and I had to go to the store anyway for milk. You don't have to eat the whole thing – just have a few tablespoons.' But she can't do that. He should stop bringing home the ice cream until she's in a place in her lifestyle change where she can handle it."

On the flip side, if you're unhappy with your spouse's weight gain, ultimatums don't work. "The more you push someone to lose weight, the more they'll gain it," Sarvis says. "An ultimatum is like saying, I don't love you enough, and you're not worth it this way. A person may want to be thin, but when feeling pressured they'll be passive-aggressive and say 'Screw you.'"

How you respond to relationship stress can also tip the, uh, *scales*. For some, eustress (good stress) is a

cause to celebrate with food (we got a tax refund – let's order pizza!). For others, negative events send them running to the fridge (what a jerk – I'm ordering pizza!). Either way, it's eating for the wrong reasons.

"People turn to comfort food to feel better," Sarvis explains. "Usually, that's in the form of carbs or sweets. Rather than eating, talk about your feelings or agree to take a time out. Eat when you're hungry, not because you're stressed."

My boyfriend and I have made some progress. He prepares smaller portions now, and includes more veggies. And the next time he bakes me brownies, he knows I'll very sweetly tell him where he can shove them. He's trying.

Anyway, I realize how I eat is my choice. I'm back to my Egg Beaters and exercise, and have dropped some of the weight. I plan to lose the rest before the end of the year, so I don't need to waste my New Year's resolutions on my diet (again!). And when I'm back in my skinny jeans I plan to celebrate...with a single bowl of my favorite Ben & Jerry's. ◉

**Names has been changed to protect privacy*

HOW TO AVOID TIPPING THE SCALE

- **Eat healthier together.** Buy a healthy cookbook and practice preparing dishes. Make it a team effort.
- **Get up!** Schedule some active time at least 30 minutes, five times a week. Ride a bike, play tennis. Save the movie as a reward.
- **Keep healthy snacks by the TV.** Save the pizza for special occasions. Instead, munch almonds, carrot sticks and rice cakes.
- **Replace sweets with sweet nothings.** The next time you feel like having a cookie, have a kiss instead.
- **Prepare separate meals.** If your partner insists on lasagna, make your own grilled chicken salad.
- **Eat only when you're hungry.** You don't have to eat whenever your partner does.
- **Rethink your motivation.** Just because you're no longer on the market doesn't mean you should let yourself go. Be healthy for you. Partners may come and go – the weight remains.