

New Book Takes Night Eating Syndrome out of the Dark

FOR AN INTERVIEW REQUEST OR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
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- **Nine percent of individuals seen in clinics for the treatment of obesity suffer from it.**
- **Approximately 1.5 percent of the general population has it**
- **It was identified in 1955, yet you've probably never heard of it**

It's night eating syndrome, the eating disorder that happens in the dark, and now there's help for those with it. **Albert J. Stunkard**, the physician, who, with his colleagues in 1955, first identified NES has teamed up with psychologist **Kelly C. Allison** to write *Overcoming Night Eating Syndrome*. It's the first-ever book to shed light on NES and to offer those who suffer from it help, compassion, and understanding. Here's just some of what they have to say.

Doctors and therapists are not likely to recognize NES. Few doctors and mental health practitioners have been trained to recognize NES. As a result they may misdiagnose patients, minimize their symptoms, or prescribe ineffective treatment.

Night eating syndrome is characterized by five primary signs.

1. **Not feeling hungry in the morning.** Those with NES often lack the desire to eat until lunchtime or the afternoon.
2. **Overeating in the evening.** For NES sufferers hunger significantly picks up in the evening and causes them to overeat.
3. **Difficulty falling asleep.** NES sufferers often find it hard to fall off to sleep and may need to eat something before going to bed in order to drift off.
4. **Waking at night and eating.** Night eaters wake up at least once a night and are often unable to go back to sleep unless they have something to eat. On average they get up out of bed 1.7 times a night, or about 12 times a week; and they eat 1.4 times per night, or about 9.5 times a week.
5. **Feeling depressed.** Night eaters have a higher rate of depression than non-night eaters and often report feeling sad and stressed.

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Overcoming Night Eating Syndrome: A Step-by-Step Guide to Breaking the Cycle
by Kelly C. Allison, Ph.D., and Albert J. Stunkard, MD, with Sara L. Thier
ISBN: 1-57224-327-9, \$14.95,

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800-748-6273, www.newharbinger.com

Genetic factors play a strong role in the development of NES. In a study that Allison and Stunkard conducted at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine they found that 17 percent of all immediate family members of those with NES also showed symptoms of the disorder. Only 5 percent of those immediate family members of non-NES subjects showed symptoms of it.

Night eating syndrome is a hybrid disorder. NES is an eating disorder, a sleep disorder, and a mood disorder. It's an eating disorder because night eaters struggle with a lopsided eating pattern that runs counter to the "breakfast-lunch-dinner" routine of normal eaters. Their interest in food may be nil until dinnertime, when it spikes and continues to rise throughout the night. One study found that night eaters ate 80 percent of the times when they awoke at night, while their non-NES counterparts did not eat at all when they awoke. It's a mood disorder because night eaters suffer a level of depression that is significantly higher and different in character (see below) than that of those without NES. In their studies at the University of Pennsylvania, Stunkard and Allison found that about 45 percent of night eaters had experienced a major depressive episode at some point in their lives. By comparison, only 18 percent of the non-NES subjects had undergone a bout of major depression. Night eaters often report feeling sad, stressed, and anxious. NES is a sleep disorder because those with it experience a much lower level of *sleep efficiency*, which is the proportion of restful sleep compared to the total amount of time spent between going to bed and getting up. In their studies, Stunkard and Allison found that this proportion was 65 percent for night eaters and 82 percent for those without NES.

Many people with NES experience a unique pattern of depression. Those with night eating syndrome tend to feel more intensely depressed as the day continues. After 8 P.M. night eaters are more likely to experience a drop in mood than are non-night eaters.

A significantly higher percentage of men suffer from NES as opposed to other eating disorders. Forty percent of NES sufferers are men. They make up only 10 percent of the total populations of those with anorexia or bulimia.

NES is often triggered by a stressful event. Seventy-five percent of those who suffer from NES experienced its onset after a stressful life event, such as an illness in the family or losing a job.

Hormones play a key role in NES. One study compared the hormonal responses to stress of women with NES to those without it. They each received a dose of, corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH), which triggers the release of the stress hormone, adrenocorticotropic-releasing hormone (ACTH), which in turn stimulates the production of cortisol, another stress hormone. The night eaters showed significantly less production of ACTH and cortisol in response to the CRH injection when compared with the reaction of non-NES subjects. The appetite-regulating hormones leptin and ghrelin have also been linked to NES, as has the sleep-regulating hormone, melatonin. Other studies have found that those with NES have higher levels of cortisol and ACTH throughout the twenty-four hours of the day. Although there is still much to learn about the role of hormones in NES, there is reason to believe they play a crucial role in the development or maintenance of night eating syndrome.

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The housemates and partners of those with NES often wake to find that their food is gone. When their behavior is “exposed” by roommates and partners who wake to find that their food has vanished, night eaters are faced with embarrassment, shame, and guilt. This is often compounded by unsympathetic responses or a lack of understanding on the part of their housemates.

In their work at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine Stunkard and Allison have seen night eating syndrome exact a steep toll on their patients. Diabetes, obesity, and high blood pressure are just some of its physical consequences and its emotional demands are no less onerous. As the disorder undermines career, personal relationships, and overall well being, many night eaters slide into despair.

Overcoming Night Eating Syndrome is the first book to offer hope to those who—until now—have suffered in literal and figurative darkness. Stunkard and Allison provide a step-by-step plan for breaking free of night eating syndrome. As important, they recognize the pain of those with NES and, with clear and compelling data, they legitimize this forgotten eating disorder. Stunkard and Allison provide:

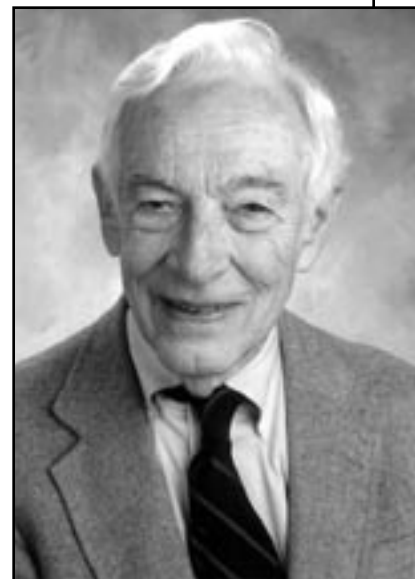
- A solid lay person’s explanation of the biology behind NES;
- A quiz and other diagnostic materials for determining if you have NES;
- Step-by-step exercises for breaking the cycle of night eating and returning to a healthy pattern of eating;
- Suggestions for how to communicate with others about night eating syndrome;
- An overview of the medication options;
- Relaxation techniques for overcoming the anxiety that is a result of and a contributing factor to NES;
- Everything you need to know to ensure you get the right diagnosis.

About Drs. Stunkard & Allison

Albert J. Stunkard, MD

- Stunkard and colleagues first identified night eating syndrome in 1955 when they published a paper on it in the *American Journal of Medicine*.
- His research has been supported by the National Institutes of Health for forty years.
- He is the founder of the Weight and Eating Disorders Program at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

Stunkard is also a professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. He is the author of over 400 publications, mostly in the field of obesity and is currently director emeritus at the Weight and Eating Disorders Program at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Dr. Stunkard has been quoted in numerous print articles (see “NES in the News”) and has been interviewed on radio and television.



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Kelly C. Allison, Ph.D.

- Allison was director of a recent study on NES at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.
- She is a clinical psychologist and instructor at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School.

Allison received her BA from the University of Notre Dame in 1995 and the MA and Ph.D. from Miami University in 1997 and 2000, respectively. Along with researching treatment for night eating syndrome, she studies the sociocultural influences on eating disorders. She has appeared on television and is a frequent presenter at conferences.

Sara L. Thier currently works in the Quality of Care Program Area of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation at Princeton, NJ. She received her BA from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor in 1987, her MPH at UCLA in 1991, and is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in health policy.

Suggested Interview Question for Drs. Stunkard & Allison

1. How common is night eating syndrome compared to other, more publicized eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia?
2. You recently conducted a study of night eaters at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. What are a few of your findings?
3. You say that you've noticed four different types of night eating. What are they and is any one of them more common than the others?
4. What are the key symptoms of NES and how do you differentiate it from binge eating disorder or just overeating?
5. In the beginning of *Overcoming Night Eating Syndrome* you say that men represent 40 percent of those with NES. This is higher than in most other eating disorders. Any idea why?
6. You say that NES is a mood disorder, a sleep disorder, and an eating disorder. How does it fit into each of these categories?

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7. One of the most humiliating situations for a night eater is when a roommate or partner wakes to find that his or her food has been eaten overnight. What are few ways of handling this situation that you recommend to your patients?
8. Why do you think so few clinicians are able to recognize NES and what is it frequently misdiagnosed as?
9. You say that night eaters experience a kind of depression that is unique to them. Can you tell us a little about this?
10. What do you know about the causes of NES?
11. In *Overcoming Night Eating Syndrome* you mention a study that compared the hormonal activity of night eaters to non-night eaters. What did this study find?
12. Are there any medications that seem to help night eaters?

Voices of NES

The human cost of night eating syndrome is profound. Many with it are racked by guilt, self-blame, and anxiety. Here's what some of the night eaters that Allison and Stunkard worked with had to say about NES and its affect on their lives.

“Thank goodness I have discovered that this is a real disorder. I feel like a pig and somehow like a person with a dirty secret. I am embarrassed about my lack of self-control and angry that I am sabotaging my health and my weight-loss goals with this behavior.”

—Anonymous

“When I wake up at night, I feel a compulsive urge to eat and I feel I won't be able to fall back asleep if I don't eat.”

—Diane

“I could work myself into a panic attack just thinking about having to go to bed without my snacks. When I stay over at other people's homes, I will either sneak something from the fridge and hide it going up the stairs or I'll say good night to everyone and sneak back down and raid the refrigerator. It doesn't make any difference what I eat. It just has to be something.”

—Anonymous

“I avoid naps because if I sleep for even an hour, I always eat when I wake up. If anyone tries to talk to me right after a nap, I want to kill him or her. All I want is food, whether it tastes good or not.”

—Anonymous

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“I get up—as if I am on autopilot. I head straight for the kitchen, and I can’t fall back to sleep unless I put something into my mouth. My sister’s son is staying with us for the summer and I’m really embarrassed because I’ve been eating all of his snacks.”

—Amanda

Raves for *Overcoming Night Eating Syndrome*

“Night eating syndrome was discovered some forty years ago by one of the field’s most creative thinkers, Albert Stunkard. He and his colleagues now make another breakthrough—an authoritative book that describes night eating, explains its causes, and outlines quite specifically what can be done for its remedy. This book is a real treasure.”

—**Kelly D. Brownell, Ph.D.**, professor and chair of psychology, and director of the Yale Center for Eating and Weight Disorders at Yale University

“*Overcoming Night Eating Syndrome* is a ground breaking description of a very real and oftentimes devastating syndrome that most health care professionals and the general public have not yet heard of. This innovative book, by the pioneer who first identified this serious disorder fifty years ago, along with his colleagues, offers hope and guidance for providing relief for this under-recognized, increasingly common problem. It gives individuals who suffer with the disorder insight and specific strategies for curbing night eating and for taking control of their lives. Highly recommended.”

—**John P. Foreyt, Ph.D.**, director of the Behavioral Medicine Research Center at Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas

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