



# You'll Probably **GAIN** Weight When...

BY ARRICCA SANSONE

**S**uddenly seeing a muffin top spill over your jeans? Wondering when saddlebags became part of your silhouette? We reached out to experts to figure out the most common times in a woman's life when the pounds seem to sneak up. Here's when they said you're most vulnerable—and what they offered as smart solutions to take back your shape

## CHALLENGE: SCHOOL'S IN SESSION

Whether you're in college, grad school or going back for your degree, balancing 12 credits worth of classes, four loads of laundry and a job can throw healthy eating off track. "You're pressed for time, so you eat whatever is convenient instead of what's healthy, or you snack mindlessly while you're studying," says Janice E. Whitty, M.D., professor and chief of obstetrics at Meharry Medical College in Nashville.

### The Solution

Pick up a couple weeks' worth of convenient, good-for-you foods such as precut fresh veggies, frozen veggies and canned beans. "Have a healthy snack, like a tiny package of almonds, low-fat string cheese or an apple to keep your blood sugar level steady between meals," says Whitty. "It's also easy to misinterpret thirst as hunger when you're tense." Sip water spiked with lemon, lime or cucumber slices, and skip sodas. Having just one soft drink a day was linked to a 44 percent higher adjusted risk of developing abdominal obesity, high cholesterol and elevated blood pressure, a recent study found.

## CHALLENGE: YOU'RE CRAZY IN LOVE

Would you rather whip up a nutritious bagged lunch on Thursday night or hang out with your man at the club? Is the treadmill calling you as often now that your new Romeo does so daily?

"A new guy means you're eating out, going out for drinks, and maybe not hitting the gym like you did when you were unattached," says Constance Brown-Riggs, M.S.Ed., R.D., spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. "But just a few extra hundred calories a day, such as appetizers and dessert, quickly add up."

### The Solution

Before you dig in, divide and box half your restaurant



WOMAN, CHRIS SANDERS/GETTY IMAGES; COUPLE, FLINTCOREIS

meal for lunch the next day. Ask the waitstaff to remove the bread basket or chips. Have a wine spritzer instead of a piña colada. "Think about calories like a budget," says Brown-Riggs. "If you overspend at one meal, cut back on the next." Get active with your man by going dancing, bike riding, or taking a walk before dinner. If you're married, pay attention if your hubby gets chubby: A 2007 study in *The New England Journal of Medicine* found that if your spouse's waistline expands, you're 37 percent more likely to gain weight, too.

### CHALLENGE: YOU'RE GOING TO BE A MOM

The baby wants chocolate. And pizza. And a hot dog. All together. But eating whatever you want piles on pounds now—and later. "You only need 300 extra calories a day for the baby, the amount consumed when you have, say, a couple servings of fruit and a glass of milk," says Gail Nunlee-Bland, M.D., chief of endocrinology at Howard University in Washington, D.C. "But many women eat far more than that a day, then carry over that habit once the baby's born."

### The Solution

"Keep your weight gain to your doctor's recommendation, which is usually about 25 to 35 pounds," advises Nunlee-Bland. Squeeze in exercise or extra activity whenever you can. Pace while you're talking on the phone. Get up to change the TV channel instead of using the remote. Make a lap around the mall before you shop for the layette. Once baby arrives, breast-feeding can burn about 500 calories a day, but don't overeat because you think you need to compensate.

### CHALLENGE: YOU'RE GOING THROUGH A MAJOR TRANSITION

New job not what you thought it would be? Gotta find an apartment—fast—and pack up your entire life? Giving your boyfriend the boot? The stress of change can cause you to make less healthy choices. "Almost anytime you face an alteration in your life circumstances, your eating and exercise routines are at risk of being derailed," says Keecha Harris, Dr.P.H., R.D., adjunct instructor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. "Many of us are emotional eaters and reward ourselves with food after a hard day."

### The Solution

"Food isn't the only thing that can bring you comfort," says

Harris. Learn to rely on other pleasures: Take a ten-minute walk to clear your head. Get a manicure or massage. Read a book. Surf the Web to plan your next vacation.

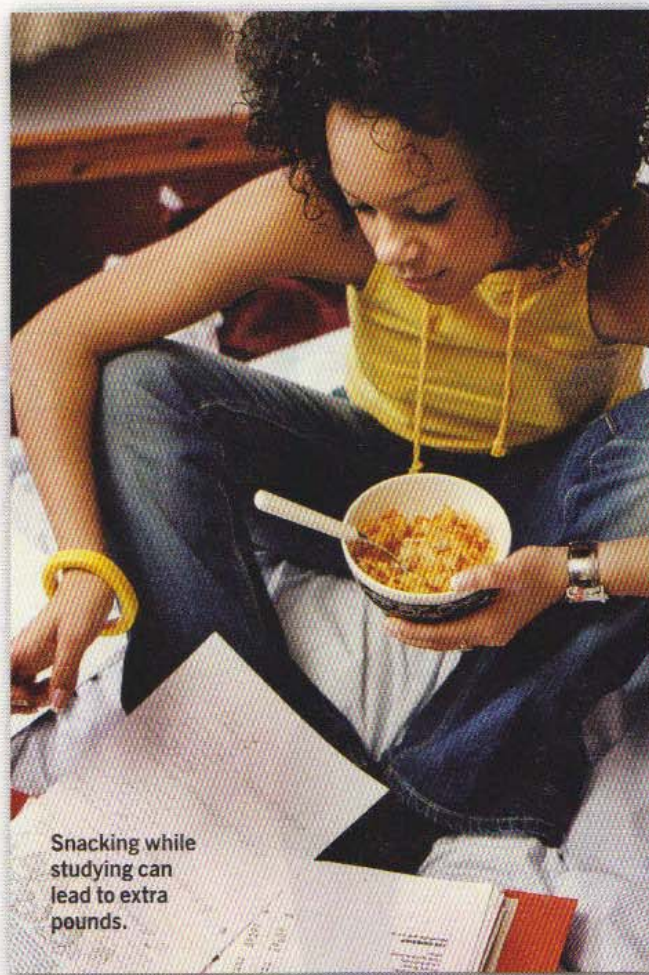
### CHALLENGE: YOU'VE QUIT SMOKING

You're committed to butting out, but now all you want to do is eat. "It's very common for people to substitute food for nicotine," says Vivian Dickerson, M.D., executive medical director at Hoag Memorial Hospital Women's Health Services in Newport Beach, California. "In addition, smoking dulls your taste buds, so food is more appealing now because you're able to taste and smell better."

### The Solution

The good news is that most ex-smokers only gain about ten pounds, when they do nothing to increase their activity levels.

"I tell patients to be aware that weight gain is a possibility, but don't drive yourself crazy over it," says Dickerson. "The bottom line is that smoking is a far greater health risk than a modest weight gain." To avoid shoveling in food when a cigarette craving calls, establish rituals to replace lighting up: Take a bath. Do a puzzle. Call a friend or a support line.



Snacking while studying can lead to extra pounds.

### CHALLENGE: MENOPAUSE HITS

Your body is changing during menopause and you may not be as active as you used to be, which doubles the trouble. "You're not chasing little kids around anymore, or maybe your schedule is less fast-paced these days," says Christine Laine, M.D., senior deputy editor of *Annals of Internal Medicine*. "While on average we gain about a pound a year, most of the evidence indicates we're simply less active but eating the same amount."

### The Solution

"If you notice a few extra pounds, do something about it now," cautions Laine. "It's far easier to cut back and lose five pounds than it is to lose 30." Try incorporating more water-rich foods, such as fruits and veggies, into meals. A 2007 study in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* showed that increasing fruit and veggie intake helps maintain weight loss while controlling hunger. Or strap on a pedometer. Figure out your average daily mileage, then find ways of working more steps into every day.