

# Too Much Work Can Pack On the Pounds

*Overtime May Add More to Your Waistline than Your Wallet*

-- By Rebecca Pratt, Staff Writer

Do you have a schedule that requires you to work more than forty hours per week, leaving you exhausted at the end of every workday? If so, go weigh yourself. If the number on the scale is higher than you believe it should be, you can probably blame your busy schedule for contributing to your excess weight.

**Work can add weight**—that's the conclusion of a new Finnish study involving 9,000 Helsinki city employees, ages 40 to 60. University of Helsinki researchers found that weight gain was especially likely for individuals who must balance demanding jobs with the hectic requirements of family. In the study, a fourth of the women, along with 19 percent of the men, reported that they had gained weight the previous year. Strongly associated with weight gain was work fatigue.

**The study identified two basic risk factors that seem to lead to weight gain:** (1) consistently working beyond the standard 40 hours per week, and (2) consistently experiencing feelings of work fatigue.

The first factor, particularly high among women, involved those participants who expressed dissatisfaction with how they were able to combine paid work with family life. The second factor involved participants who agreed with three or more of these statements:

- My work is definitely too stressful.
- I feel like I'm totally exhausted.
- I feel totally worn out after a day at work.
- I feel tired in the morning when I have to get up and go to work.
- I worry about my work even when I'm off duty.
- I have to work too hard.

Researchers concluded that both risk factors involve work fatigue or burnout—conditions that may tempt workers to soothe midday stress by turning to vending machine treats, scarfing down fast food, and skipping exercise because they lack both time and energy. So what can you do if extra hours on the job may be causing you to pack on the pounds?

Only you can be the judge of what you can do to improve the situation, but here are some tips that may help:

- **Take a break from your television for a week**—or even one day a week. You may be surprised to find yourself enjoying the quiet, picking up a book you've always meant to read, or talking to your kids. At the very least, you may find yourself going to bed earlier when you feel tired, instead of spacing out in front of the boob tube.
- **Look for areas of your life to simplify or consolidate.** For example, can you set aside a day to run all (or even most) of your errands, saving time and gas? Can you teach your kids to plan ahead so that you're not heading to the mall every other day?
- **Evaluate your work schedule and tasks.** See which items require some overtime, and then try to plan one or two days to consciously work overtime to accomplish those tasks. You may still be working long hours, but you'll have some control over your schedule, rather than being at someone else's whims. You may even improve your efficiency.
- **Take a good hard look at your job.** Is it a good fit for you? While we all have areas of dissatisfaction in our work, it's generally not normal to be continually exhausted at the end of the day. When we're well suited to our work, we should enjoy it much of the time. Assuming that you don't have an untenable amount of work (and if you do, that may require a conversation with the boss), maybe it's time to start looking for a new job.