

Decreasing Stress with Good Nutrition

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You Are What You Eat / You Eat What You Are

The relationship between mood and energy is the direct correlation between what we eat and how we live. For most of us, just making a few simple changes in what and when we eat is all it takes to make us feel better.

Together with a positive mental attitude, physical activity and relaxation; eating correctly can make the difference between getting by and feeling great!

So What is a Healthy Diet?

There are three basic nutrients: carbohydrates, proteins and fats. They are all important for proper nutrition.

Carbohydrates are needed to fuel the body for physical activity. The best sources of carbohydrates are those that have many vitamins, minerals, and fiber such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and beans.

Protein helps us feel full longer, slows hunger pangs and helps keep blood sugar levels steady. Protein is an important part of meals as well as snacks.

Believe it or not, **fat** has its place in the body as well. Just like protein, fat can help us feel satisfied for a longer period of time. Some examples of good fats include olive and canola oil, almonds, avocados, pecans, hazelnuts, walnuts and fish.

Chemistry for Feeling Good

Foods **high in folate, omega 3 fatty acids and tryptophan** increase serotonin levels. Serotonin fills receptor sites on brain cells resulting in a "feel good" response.

Foods that Boost our Mood

One should eat **fish such as sardines, mackerel, halibut, tuna and salmon**, which boost serotonin levels. They are effective in treating depression.

Leafy greens such as **collards, spinach, and swiss chard** are rich in folate and B vitamins which increase serotonin.

Walnuts and flaxseed contain **omega 3 fatty acids**. **Almonds, Brazil nuts, sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds** provide magnesium which helps us relax and soothes the mind.

Pasta and whole wheat contain tryptophan which is an amino acid and precursor to serotonin.

Pinto, kidney, white and black beans regulate blood sugar with fiber which contains magnesium iron and B vitamins.

Foods that Calm

Foods with high amounts of tryptophan increase serotonin. Some examples include **yogurt, cottage cheese, cheese, milk and turkey**.

About Junk Foods...

Junk food plus stress equals more stress. If we rely on the vending machine when we experience stress, it may make us even more stressed. It is because eating foods with significant salt, sugar and/or fat may hamper the ability to cope with stress. This is how...

- **Caffeine** in coffee and tea can release the stress hormone that leads to a **hyperarousal state**.
- **Sugar** can lower vitamin stores such as Vitamin B6, which may lead to **anxiety, irritability and fatigue**.
- **Simple sugars** found in candy bars and soda can create an unstable blood sugar which can lead to **irritability and headaches**.

Vitamins and minerals are needed for energy metabolism, which are necessary for the stress response itself. Balance is always the key.

One should eat a well-balanced meal that includes trim meats, whole grains, fruits and vegetables, which may decrease our stress level as well as our response to that level of stress.

Some Menu Ideas

Stress Reducing Meals

Breakfast: Whole grain cereal with low fat milk and blueberries.

Lunch: Tomato soup, spinach salad with grilled chicken.

Dinner: Bean and cheese whole grain tortillas topped with salsa and guacamole.

Snack: Chummus with vegetables.

Mood Elevated Meals

Breakfast: Smoothie with yogurt, fresh fruit or oatmeal with cinnamon and fresh apple.

Lunch: Tuna fish salad on whole wheat bread, lettuce and tomato and some walnuts.

Dinner: Roast chicken, sweet potato and salad.

Snack: Apples and peanut butter.

If you have any questions, please contact **Yaffa Hollander**, a professional nutritionist: **973-736-5624**