

Nutrition and Stress

“The stress response of the body is somewhat like an airplane readying for take-off. Virtually all systems (e.g., the heart and blood vessels, the immune system, the lungs, the digestive system, the sensory organs, and brain) are modified to meet the perceived danger.” Not all stress is bad. Research suggests that some stress is good and healthy.

Stress Quiz

Ask yourself the following questions to see if you might have eating habits that are affected by your stress level.

1. Question: Do you feel like you have to skip breakfast or other meals because you do not have time?

Answer: Yes / No

2. Question: Do you depend on caffeine to keep you awake in the morning, and at other times of the day, when you are feeling low in energy?

Answer: Yes/No

3. Question: Are you starving when you get home from a busy day of classes and other activities?

Answer: Yes/No

4. Question: When you eat under stress, do you only choose foods that are high in salt, simple sugars, and/or fat?

Answer: Yes/No

5. Question: Have you gained or lost weight recently due to stress eating?

Answer: Yes/No

If you answered, “yes” to any of these questions, your stress level may affect your diet and your health. The following helpful hints may help you manage stress, and make better food choices.

Manage Your Stress: Simple ways to Ease Stress

1. Eating a healthy and well balanced food plan: Eating healthy foods and drinking plenty of water is a good way to combat stress.

Including more fruits and vegetables in your diet helps nourish your body with B vitamins and minerals to deal with stress. Alcohol and food abuse may seem to reduce stress, but it actually adds to it.

2. Exercise component is essential:

Choose non-competitive exercise and set reasonable goals. Aerobic exercise has been shown to release endorphins (natural substances that help you feel better and maintain a positive attitude).

3. Study and practice relaxation techniques. Relax every day.

Choose from a variety of different techniques. Combine opposites; a time for deep relaxation and a

time for aerobic exercise is a sure way to protect your body from the effects of stress.

4. Reduce stressors (cause of stress).

Identify your stressors and manage them effectively and on time. Effective time-management skills involve asking for help when appropriate, setting priorities, pacing yourself, and taking time out for yourself.

5. Assert yourself.

You do not have to meet others’ expectations or demands. It’s okay to say “No.” Remember, being assertive allows you to stand up for your rights and beliefs while respecting those of others.

6. If you smoke, get some help to stop.

Aside from health risks of cigarettes, nicotine acts as a stimulant and can cause more stress symptoms.

7. Take responsibility.

Control what you can and leave behind what you cannot control.

8. Examine your values and live by them.

The more your actions reflect your beliefs, the better you will feel, no matter how busy your life is. Use your values when choosing your activities.

9. Set realistic goals and expectations.

It’s okay, and healthy, to realize you cannot be 100% successful all the time.

10. Wait 15 or 30 minutes

when you have stress-related cravings.

Sometimes we confuse hunger, fatigue and thirst. Drink some water and take a break first and then re-evaluate if you are truly hungry.

NUTRITION & STRESS

Lifestyle Recommendations:

- Reduce stress
- Drink half your body weight in ounces of pure water
- Daily walking in fresh air whenever possible (for at least 20 minutes)
- Yoga/relaxation exercises
- Massage as often as possible
- Avoid smoking
- Aromatherapy (jasmine, geranium, and ylang yland)

Dietary Recommendations:

- Reduce/eliminate caffeine and alcohol
- Eat small frequent meals every 3-4 hours that include protein
- Eat at least one fruit and/or vegetable at every meal or snack
- Drink plenty of water

Food sources that combat fatigue:

Iron: liver, oysters, clams, fortified cereals/grain, prune juice, dried apricots, soybean nuts, legumes, spinach, potato with skin, peas, molasses (blackstrap), oatmeal, sunflower seeds, cashews

Folate: broccoli, brussels sprouts, dark leafy greens, asparagus, sweet potato, orange juice, legumes, soybeans, wheat germ, eggs

B12: animal protein, beef, oysters, clams, crab, tuna, cheese, eggs, milk, yogurt, liver

Magnesium: legumes, tofu, buckwheat, wheat germ, cornmeal, oatmeal, brown rice, spinach, shrimp

Protein: meat, chicken, fish, turkey, milk, eggs, soy, beans, legumes

Vitamin C: peppers, citrus fruits, tomatoes, kiwi, broccoli, papaya, brussels sprouts, green leafy vegetables

B1: pork, peas, tofu, peanuts, sunflower/sesame seeds, oatmeal, barley

Nutrients affected by stress:

Calcium: works with magnesium to transmit nerve impulses; stress-induced depletes calcium; take with magnesium at bedtime can help cut stress; found in milk, yogurt, dairy, broccoli, dark leafy greens, legumes, soymilk, fortified orange juice, almonds

Magnesium: see above

B Vitamins (B2, Pantothenic Acid): milk, yogurt, cottage cheese, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, dark leafy greens, beef, pork, liver, chicken, eggs, salmon, peas, corn, lentils

Chromium: brewers yeast, liver, meats, oysters, seafood, whole grains, bran cereals, mushrooms, asparagus, prunes, raisins, potato, nuts, cheese

Vitamin A (beta carotene): dark leafy greens, carrots, cantaloupe, sweet potato, papaya, apricots, hubbard squash, mango

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