



# Lifestyle and Managing Stress

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Do you have a go-to comfort food when you feel stressed? If so, you are not alone. During times of stress, many of us may reach for foods or snacks and often these are high in saturated fats or added sugars. The fact that stress can impact food choices is not news. However, are there also foods or nutrients that can help you to reduce stress?

## **Our Body's Fight or Flight Response**

Your central nervous system releases stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol when you feel anxious or stressed. These hormones trigger the fight or flight response, which gets your body ready for action. For example, your heart can beat more rapidly, your blood pressure may rise and your rate of breathing might increase. Being in a chronic state of stress can cause long term health problems. In addition to feeling anxious, many may become depressed, struggle to get a good night's sleep or experience digestive issues?

## **Can Certain Nutrients Ease Stress?**

Research linking certain nutrients to stress management is limited. Recent studies have focused on nutrients the brain needs to function normally. This can include nutrients like antioxidants or B vitamins. Studies have looked at how supplements may help manage stress but results have been limited. As these nutrients are already important in a healthy eating pattern, the best way to get them is through the

foods you eat. For example, fruits and vegetables contain antioxidants along with other nutrients that may work together to promote health. And many foods provide a variety of B vitamins naturally, including whole grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy products, beans and meats.

Some studies also report a potential link between low levels of nutrients in the body such as vitamin D and stress. These studies did not prove that inadequate intake of foods with this nutrient causes stress or that increased intake of foods with this nutrients ease stress. However, your body does need it to function normally. And there are lots of foods that contain vitamin D including fatty fish and fortified dairy and soy products.

### **Do Vitamin and Mineral Supplements Combat Stress?**

Some supplements claim to help manage stress. At this time, however, the evidence supporting these supplements is limited and much more research is needed. Talk with your health care provider before taking any vitamin and mineral supplements.

### **Stress-Busters**

When it comes to food and stress, one of the best things you can do for your body is to choose a balanced, healthful eating style. Participating in regular physical activity is also beneficial for managing stress. As little five minutes of exercise a day can be beneficial. A **Registered Dietitian Nutritionist** can help you establish an individualized healthy eating plan that includes specific food preferences and goals for physical activity.

Other ways to help ease stress might include:

- Relaxation activities, such as meditation, guided imagery or breathing exercises.
- Socializing with friends and loved ones for emotional support during stressful situations.
- If stress has you craving crunchy foods, reach for lower calorie, healthful foods such as carrots, celery or plain popcorn.
- Consider seeking professional help. Stress can become debilitating. Counselors and other health care providers can offer treatments to help combat stress.

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