

Blueprints for Change

ANTI-STRESS THERAPY

Are you stressed out? Is your energy at an all-time low?

More and more research shows that stress contributes to a myriad of diseases, both acute and chronic. New statistics show that up to 95% of visits to health care practitioners are stress-related. Stress seems to be inevitable in today's world with the continuous demands put on us by careers, family and lifestyle or the pressure which we impose on ourselves because of our need to achieve certain goals. The issue is not so much how many external stressors we have affecting us, but rather our reaction to them. The key is being able to effectively manage our level of stress.

Good nutrition is one answer to help combat stress. Nutrients that are commonly depleted by stress include the antioxidant vitamins A, E and C, the B vitamins and the minerals zinc, selenium, calcium, magnesium, iron, potassium and sulphur.

Keep the following in mind as you decide which foods to eat:

- As stress increases, protein needs increase.
- Eat fresh fish or seafood at least once a week.
- Add magnesium-rich foods such as dark green vegetables, most nuts (almonds, pecans, cashews, brazil), seeds, legumes, wheat, wheat germ/bran, millet, brown rice, avocados, dried apricots and whole grains. Magnesium is tranquilizing, helps balance the nervous system and supports heart function.
- Add more potassium-rich foods like salmon, bananas, seafood, leafy green vegetables, peas, broccoli, raisins, apricots, whole grains and avocados to your diet. Potassium is important in preventing heart irregularities and muscle cramps. It helps reduce stress-related high blood pressure.
- Reduce high sodium foods which dehydrate the body.
- Add calcium-rich foods such as milk, yogurt, most cheeses and buttermilk. Foods with a lesser amount of calcium include broccoli, cauliflower, many peas and beans, sardines with bones, almonds, Brazil nuts, hazelnuts, sunflower and sesame seeds and molasses. Calcium is vital to nerve transmission and regular heartbeat as well as immune function.
- Eat foods with a high B-vitamin content – brown rice, brewer's yeast, liver, whole grains (especially the bran and germ), meats (especially organ meats), nuts, beans and peas.
- Vitamin C-rich foods are essential for adrenal gland function. Stress depletes the adrenal gland hormones, the anti-stress hormones. Vitamin C-rich foods include strawberries, citrus fruits, kiwi fruit, pineapple, cabbage, turnip greens, tomatoes, broccoli, spinach, rose hips, cantaloupe, peppers, chives, cauliflower.
- Zinc, which is needed for immune function and to protect the cells from free radical damage, is found in oysters, red meats, liver, herring, egg yolks, milk products, whole grains, brewer's yeast, nuts (pecans, Brazil nuts), pumpkin seeds, ginger root, mustard, chili powder and black pepper.

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Herbs may also be useful as part of an anti-stress program.

- Valerian root, by itself or in combination with other herbs such as passionflower, chamomile, vervain and hops, has a tranquillizing effect and can be used before sleep or as a muscle relaxant.
- Ginseng root is often thought of as a stimulant but is commonly used for stress.
- Gotu kola leaf is a good herb for mental stress.
- Ashwagandha acts as a sedative and nerve tonic.
- Schizandra and dong quai support the kidneys, adrenal glands and central nervous system. These organs are the most affected by stress.

So if you are feeling stressed, try to incorporate more of the foods listed above into your diet. Avoid processed foods and all foods that create stress on the system such as artificial sweeteners, carbonated soft drinks, fried foods, junk foods, sugar, white flour products and foods containing preservatives. Your body will thank you!

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