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## The report on empirical issues of food in stress management

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### Abstract

Stress is a complex phenomenon and each individual has his/her own level of stress tolerance. Exposure to stressors results in a series of coordinated responses often referred to as 'stress responses' which are composed of series of reactions in the body including alterations in behaviour, autonomic function, secretion of multiple hormones and various physiological changes in the body. There are several ways to cope up with stress and one good solution is to eat stress fighting and reducing nutrient through food. A nutritious, well balanced diet has powerful stress reducing benefits that improve brain functioning, shore up immune function, lower blood pressure, improve the circulation, and reduce toxins from the body. Some specific nutrients play a very important role in reducing the levels of cortisol and adrenalin in the body and also the stress chemicals that activate fight and flight response.

**Keywords:** Stress, stress management techniques, food in stress management

### Introduction

Stress is an emotional state where the harmony and peace of mind are disturbed. Stress is experienced by almost everybody either in school/college, at the work place or at home. People believe that stress is a negative feeling that takes a toll on our body and mind and makes us weak. Therefore we should learn to keep control over ourselves and make it a point to ensure that we do not end up being the cause of our own stress.

### Characteristics of Stress

Stress is characterized by feelings such as anxiety, nervousness and anger. Whenever we feel overpowered by constant worry and tension, our body releases certain chemicals that lead to stress. Stress is self imposed and it is we who make room for stress to invade our lives. Stress could be kept away if we could focus on more important issues in life rather than wasting our time and energy in worrying about trivial matters. Thus we end up being the creators of our own stress.

### Stress Relieving Foods

Food is the major factor affecting the levels of stress. Food can fight stress in several ways. Enough importance is not given to food and most of us are unaware of the role played by food in controlling stress levels. There are specific foodstuffs which help in relieving stress by releasing important chemicals in the body that help to relax the body. Stay cool as a cucumber with everyday foods that have been proven to calm nerves and lift your spirits.

### Foods That Comfort

The foods commonly known as Stress busters/relievers elevate levels of serotonin, a calming brain chemical, reduce levels of cholesterol and adrenaline (stress hormones) that take a toll on the body over a period of time. A nutritious diet can counteract the impact of stress by activating the immune system and lowering blood pressure. When you're feeling stressed it's easy to reach for a biscuit or a bag of crispiness to cheer yourself up. That's why they're called comfort foods, and most of the time you do it without even thinking. There are certain snacks that help your body unwind without necessarily piling on the pounds. These three food tips will have you de-stressing, relaxing and sleeping better in no time.

## **Relaxing Foods That Melt Stress Away**

### • **Complex Carbohydrate**

All carbohydrates tinkle the brain to enhance serotonin levels especially complex carbohydrates which increase the sense of well being. For a steady supply of this chemical eat plenty of whole grain breakfast cereals, whole grain bread and pastas as well as preparation with oats and ragi. They also help to stabilize blood sugar levels. Complex carbohydrates enhance the absorption of tryptophan, which is used to manufacture serotonin. Oats are a good source of soluble fiber which help to lower cholesterol in the blood. To get the best effect from oats, eat them together with some proteins such as nuts, seeds or dark chocolate. Brown rice, unrefined grains and legumes are also good sources of complex carbohydrates from which you can choose. But be sure to stay clear from moldy grains and legumes which contain some highly toxic, cancer-causing fungi

### • **Simple Carbohydrate**

They include sweets and sodas and are not recommended by nutritionists yet they provide short-term relief from stress induced irritability, since simple sugars are digested quickly leading to a spike in serotonin.

### • **Citrus Fruits**

Due to their wealth of vitamin C, they reduce levels of stress hormones while strengthening the immune system. Vitamin C releases antioxidants that battle radicals produced during stress. Other vitamin C-rich fruits are Strawberries, papaya, orange, grapefruit and guava.

### • **Spinach**

Magnesium helps to regulate cholesterol levels and tends to get depleted when we are under pressure. Too little magnesium may trigger headaches and fatigue leading to stress. One cup of spinach goes a long way in replenishing magnesium stores. Magnesium helps to keep our nerves and muscles relaxed and prevent them from becoming overexcited; a deficiency of which can lead to muscle tension, cramps and fatigue. Spinach is a magnesium powerhouse, and also a good source of vitamin A, C, iron and foliates. One cup of fresh spinach or half a cup of cooked spinach a day is a stress relaxant. Low potassium levels can cause muscle tiredness, fatigue, irritability and anxiety. Broccoli is a source of natural potassium; it is also rich in beta-carotene, vitamins C and E that strengthen immune system. With A (HINI) on the loose, it is wise to eat a few servings of broccoli each week.

### • **Fatty Fish**

To keep cholesterol and adrenaline in check make friends with fatty fish. Omega- 3- fatty acids found in fish like salmon and tuna can prevent an increase in stress hormones and protect against heart disease. For a steady supply aim to eat at least 150grams of fatty fish twice a week.

### • **Shell Fish**

Zinc is one of the main mineral in which we are deficient when stressed. So make sure you get plenty of it as it is important in regulating serotonin and melatonin which are key stress control hormones. Prawns and other shellfish, along with seaweed, brown rice, mushrooms and asparagus are also good sources of zinc. Therefore add a daily zinc supplement to your diet. Shrimps may be small, but in their

nutrient content, they are very big. Shrimps are excellent sources of tryptophan and selenium, which are essential for staying cool. They also contain good amount of omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin D and B12. If you are worried about their cholesterol content, studies suggest that the cholesterol in shrimps is good for health.

### • **Black Tea**

Tea drinkers feel calmer and have lower levels of cholesterol after stressful situations. On the other hand coffee boosts the level of cholesterol and results in excitability and stress.

### • **Nuts**

A deficiency in selenium has been linked to increased anxiety, depression and fatigue. Brazil nuts are high in this mineral. A handful of mixed nuts a day will be enough to soften the impact stress hormones have on the body. Adrenaline raises blood pressure and heart beat when under stress. Eating a handful of pistachios every day can lower blood pressure and have a calming effect on the mind and body. Almonds are full of Vitamin E which helps to bolster the immune system. Vitamin B makes the body more resilient during bouts of stress. To get the maximum benefit of the vitamins, snack on 10 almonds every day.

### • **Avocado**

One of the best ways to reduce high blood pressure is to get enough potassium. Half an avocado has more potassium than a medium sized banana.

### • **Raw Vegetables**

Crisp raw vegetables can fight the effects of stress. Munching celery, carrot sticks, ladies finger and radish helps release tension headaches. Green, yellow and orange vegetables are all rich in minerals, vitamins and photochemical, which boost immune response and alleviate anxiety and stress.

### • **Milk**

Milk is very helpful in relieving stress. They are rich in antioxidants and a daily intake of milk either warm or cold is recommended. The calcium present in milk can reduce muscle spasms and soothe tension as well as ease anxiety, though skim or low fat milk is recommended.

### • **Cheese & Fruit**

Cheese and fruit help in controlling stress levels. Both of them contain high degree of vitamin C. Try mixing them together as a stress reliever.

### • **Essential Fats**

Oily fish has been mentioned earlier as they are great stress busting foods. Essential fatty acid increases the serotonin in the brain which regulates our mood and ability to cope with stress. A fish oil supplement is the best food for stress relief. Get plenty of tryptophan (EAA). This will help to get sound sleep at night and regulate the neuro transmitters in the brain for relaxation. Foods such as bananas, milk, fish, chicken, cheese and oats are packed with tryptophan and we should try to eat 150 grams per week. Blueberries and cranberries are great stress busters and can be used as a snack whenever a person feels stressed out. There is better absorption of tryptophan when vegetables are consumed. Dark chocolate,

aside from its antioxidant value, is one food that is rich in tryptophan.

### **Other Important Aspects Which Lead To Stress Free Life**

- Eat a healthy and well balanced diet.
- Eat food at regular time intervals.
- Eat the right foodstuffs that are high in nutrients and vitamins in proper quantities.
- Eat a good breakfast as it helps in keeping the mind healthy and free from stress.

### **Foods to Avoid During Stress**

- Coffee and other caffeinated beverages such as tea, chocolate and coke
- Fried foods and foods rich in fat
- Animal foods and high protein foods
- Alcohol
- Sugar and salt
- Low fiber foods

There is a link between caffeine intake and high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels. Reduce the consumption of caffeine slowly over a period of time.

Animal foods tend to elevate the brain levels of dopamine and nor epinephrine, both of which are associated with higher levels of anxiety and stress. People become addicted to alcohol to relieve stress, but alcohol intake and stress are a deadly combination as it stimulates the secretion of adrenaline resulting in nervous tension, irritability and insomnia. Excess alcohol will increase the fat deposits in the heart and decrease the immune function. Sugar and salt depletes adrenal glands and causes emotional instability. Lower fiber foods result in stagnation of movement of the digestive system. Stress results in cramps and constipation which do not get rectified by taking low fiber foods.

### **Herbal Remedies for Stress relief**

Herbal remedies have no side effects and are a novel and interesting way of relieving stress. They make use of different types of naturally available herbs that have great medicinal properties. Herbs reduce symptoms of anxiety and bring about a calming effect.

#### **• Herbal Tea**

It is available almost everywhere and is said to be very good for controlling stress levels. This type of tea is prepared by using herbs like juniper, celery seeds, coriander seeds, tulsi, parsley, ginger, lemon and peppermint. A cup of herbal tea makes you feel refreshed and is also helpful in controlling fever and body pain, cough, depression and flu. Herbal tea has the tendency to make a person stress free.

#### **• Herbal Alternatives**

Two herbal sweeteners that really work well are stevia (the sweet herb) and licorice. To use stevia leaf, simply make a tea (1/2 tsp to a cup of water--steep for 15 minutes) and add 1/8 cup to a small amount of barley malt or brown rice syrup to enhance the sweet flavor. This combination helps mask stevia's slight bitter flavor. Stevia tastes sweet, but it will not stimulate the metabolism. The herb originates from South America, Interestingly; it is this sweetener that makes Coca Cola sweet in Japan. Basil is a good source of magnesium, which helps muscles and blood vessels to relax. Enrich the

taste of your food by adding a handful of basil leaves and you get a boost of iron, calcium, potassium and vitamin C. To prevent the loss of its essence and flavor, add the herb only near the end of the cooking process. Other types of herbs like the Linden flower and celery sticks are useful in reducing anxiety that is a common symptom of stress. Pepper mint and thyme are herbs which help in controlling the digestive problems arising due to stress. Ginseng is instrumental in building the resistance of the body and helps in fighting stress. Ginger and lemon can be mixed together and taken as a drink either in warm water or in cold water. A very effective tonic for stress relief is a common Indian drink called Panagam (using ginger, jaggery and lemon) is a soothing drink. Thus herbal remedies can be used effectively instead of loading the body with allopathic tablets and medicines and we can control stress levels in a natural manner without letting chemicals enter the body.

### **Healthy Eating At Home**

- Plan the weeks menu ahead of time so that there is no confusion about what to prepare.
- Keep the meal simple as there is no need to prepare a three course meal.
- Cook ahead as and when time permits.
- Use a slow cooker or solar cooker so that when returning from work the food is fresh and hot.

### **Conclusion**

Stress is defined as a situation where the organism's homeostasis is threatened or the organism perceives a situation as threatening. Stress coping methods are the cognitive, behavioral and psychological efforts to deal with stress. When the burden of stress is removed, food and eating relieve anxiety and anger and reduce systolic blood pressure more than when choice is involved.

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