

Healthy Eating Habits for Stress Management

One important aspect of managing stress is practicing good nutrition and healthy eating habits. These habits can help you through your stressful times now, and even prevent a heart attack 30 years down the road. Eating well will increase your physical, mental, and emotional stamina. Fueling yourself with nutrient dense foods can boost your immune system, help you maintain a healthy weight, and help you feel better about yourself.

Healthy eating plays a crucial role in your ability to deal with times of extra stress. Carbohydrates, protein, fat, vitamins, and minerals are all important for energy, mental concentration, and emotional stability. Some great healthy foods that can reduce stress are fresh fruits and vegetables, which contain stress-busting antioxidants, especially berries and green, leafy veggies. Another great option is oatmeal with cinnamon and honey which can bump up the feel-good hormone serotonin. It is also packed with slow-to-digest fiber; therefore, it will not cause an inconsistent spike in blood sugar levels. Dark chocolate-covered almonds can also reduce levels of stress hormones because they are rich in energy-boosting protein and good-for-you monounsaturated fat.

Stress may weaken your immune system and increase your body's need for certain nutrients. A balanced diet will help you stay focused, alert, energetic, and healthy during times of stress. However, if you live off of fast food or skip meals, you are more likely to perform poorly or get sick during stressful times.

A daily multivitamin/mineral supplement can be helpful at any age, but it will not replace the role that whole foods play in maintaining a healthy body. Whole foods contain many substances, such as phytochemicals and fiber, which boost the immune system and maintain health.

Any discussion about eating and stress must include caffeine and sugar. Many people use high sugar foods to keep their energy up and caffeine to keep going when they need rest. Too much caffeine will contribute to poor quality sleep and add to the negative effects of stress on the body. Sugar will satisfy you in the short term, but leave you with less energy and feeling more hungry after an hour or two. Whole foods will provide you with energy that will last for several hours.

Here are some other quick tips for managing stress in your daily life:

- Think and act constructively
- Take control
- Problem-solve
- Modify your expectations
- Be positive
- Cultivate your sense of humor
- Weed out trivia
- Learn from others
- Go with the flow
- Create strong, social support systems
- Practice good communication skills
- Get enough sleep
- Recognize how you respond to stress
- Practice optimism
- Be patient
- Make healthy lifestyle choices
- Utilize your work benefits plan
- Enjoy life!
- Focus on yourself
- Clear your mind
- Reflect – feelings, emotions, challenges
- Approach stress as an opportunity for growth