

Eat Your Way *to Calm*



Discover a Diet and Lifestyle
That Combats Stress

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Introduction

Stress. It's a normal part of human life that increases and decreases depending on what's going on in our personal, professional, or academic lives at specific times. Although at some point each of us will feel stressed about something, some people are affected more by stress than others. If left unchecked, stress can sometimes turn into further problems, such as anxiety or depression. Because of this, understanding how to prevent, manage and control your stress with your diet and your lifestyle is absolutely important. Since stress can have such a huge effect on your life if left to worsen, understanding how what you put into your body can help your mental state is absolutely vital to living a life that is calm, relaxing and stress-free.

Often, when it comes to dealing with and reducing stress, we think about removing our 'stressors' from our lives. For example, if a person is increasingly feeling stressed and anxious in the workplace, they may look to change departments, companies, or even careers. Another example would be a couple who no longer get on choosing to break up or divorce to get rid of the source of their stress. However, although steering clear of situations or people who stress you out can definitely help, one of the main things which affect stress is your diet and lifestyle.

And, since it may not always be possible to remove yourself from stressful situations immediately, making the right dietary and lifestyle changes is important to help you deal with and manage stress by staying in control. Your diet and exercise habits don't only affect your physical health; they can have a huge impact on your mental health as well. In this book, you'll learn:

The various foods which can improve your overall mental health and help you manage stress;

Why exercise is absolutely vital to combating stress;

The lifestyle habits that are stressing you out more than you may realize;

Healthy habits to combat stress;

Relaxation techniques for life;

How to recognize the need for lifestyle changes, and

Much more!

Feeling stressed out is something that we all go through at some point, but nobody particularly enjoys. Although a small amount of

stress can actually be good when it comes to motivating somebody to work hard to reach their goals – whether that be personally, professionally, or academically – having too much stress can actually have the opposite effect and can cause you to feel like you are ‘shutting down’. Common side effects of high stress levels include lack of focus, trouble concentrating, frequently forgetting things, or even feeling like your mind has gone completely blank. All of these can contribute to other things in your life going wrong, which in turn can lead to stress which is more severe or in some cases, anxiety.

Since trying to ignore your stress won’t make it go away, it’s important to know exactly what to do in order to help your stress levels remain manageable and easy to control. One of the best ways to take control of the amount of stress which you are feeling is to take control of your diet, exercise and lifestyle habits. When your diet and lifestyle are working together in your favor to combat and fight stress, you will find that you are better able to control any feelings of worry or anxiety that come up. Remember that what you put into your body isn’t just important for your physical health, but also for your mental health, too!

1. Your Stress-Busting Diet

When you're stressed out, the foods that you're turning to are most likely going to be traditional 'comfort' foods – think big meals, takeaways, fatty foods, sweet foods, and alcohol. Let's face it – we've all found some comfort in a tasty meal and a bottle of beer or glass of wine when we've been stressed out or upset about something. However, this isn't a good permanent solution. When you're turning to unhealthy foods you can feel better temporarily, but in the long run, you will feel worse. When your body isn't getting the right nutrition, you can begin to feel less energetic, more lethargic, and in some cases less able to concentrate and focus. All of this can lead to even more stress.

Foods that Fight Stress

If you've been feeling more stressed out than usual lately, it's important to know which foods are best to choose and which to avoid when it comes to combatting stress and helping you to deal with feelings of stress and anxiety. The best way to fight stress is to have a healthy, balanced diet which includes a moderate amount of each of the different food groups. Filling up on foods such as whole grains, leafy vegetables, and lean proteins as the basic staples of the diet is the best way to ensure that your body

gets the optimum amounts of nutrients to fight both physical and mental health problems. When it comes to choosing the foods to eat, some have a range of great properties which help the body to combat stress. Choosing stress-busting foods will help to heal and calm your mind permanently, rather than providing a temporary fix. Some of the best stress-fighting foods include:

Avocado – Avocados are a creamy and versatile fruit which can be eaten in a range of different ways whether you enjoy it raw, made into sauces, dressings and dips, or in a smoothie. These nutrient-dense fruits have the properties to stress-proof your body, thanks to their high glutathione content which specifically blocks the intestinal absorption of certain fats which cause oxidative damage. Avocados also contain higher levels of vitamin E, folate, and beta-carotene than any other fruit, which boosts their stress-busting properties. However, be careful with portion control when eating avocado, as it is high in fat.

Blueberries – If you're feeling stressed out and reaching for the snacks, swapping chocolate or chips for one of the best superfoods is a great way to help you deal with your stress levels and achieve a higher level of calm. Blueberries have some of the highest levels of antioxidants, especially anthocyanin, which means that this berry has been linked to a

wide range of health benefits including sharper cognition, better focus, and a clearer mind – all of which can help you to better deal with stress.

Chamomile Tea – Of course, it's not all about what you're eating when it comes to managing stress, as what you're drinking can also alleviate or worsen stress. Drinking liquids which are high in sugars and caffeine, such as coffee, energy drinks or soda, can actually increase your stress levels if consumed regularly. Chamomile tea has long been used as a natural bedtime soother, and it has also been used in clinical trials, which determined that chamomile tea is effective in reducing the symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder.

Chocolate – Although it's usually seen as an unhealthy treat, there is an undeniable link between chocolate and our mood. Studies have shown that eating chocolate can actually make you happier. However, that doesn't mean that you can start munching on chocolate bars every time you're stressed out – chocolate works best as a de-stressor when eaten in moderation and as part of a healthy and balanced diet. Dark chocolate in particular is best for you, as it contains more flavonols and polyphenols, two hugely important antioxidants which can help combat stress, more than many fruit juices.

Beef – Grass-fed beef is not only kinder to the planet and to animals, it's also good for people, too. Grass-fed beef has a huge range of antioxidants, including beta-carotene and Vitamins C and E, which can help your body to fight stress and anxiety. If you're looking for more reasons to spend a little more money on organic, grass-fed beef, it's also lower in fat than grain-fed beef whilst being higher in omega-3.

Oatmeal – Oatmeal is great in that it can be a filling comfort food, but also has a large number of healthy property to actually make you feel better from the inside out. A complex carbohydrate, eating oatmeal causes your brain to produce higher levels of the feel-good chemical serotonin, helping you to feel calmer and less stressed. Studies have shown that kids who choose oatmeal for breakfast tend to be much sharper throughout the morning in school compared to kids who had alternative morning meals.

Walnuts – If you're looking for a healthy snacking option which will help you to stay better in control of your stress levels, walnuts are a great choice. There is no denying the sweet, pleasant flavor of walnuts and they can be a tasty snack for in-between meals or as part of a desert. A versatile nut, walnuts are great for salads, or add them to a sweet treat such as coffee and walnut cake.

Pistachios – another food which is great for snacking on and can also help to combat stress and anxiety in the long term is pistachios. Studies have found that simply eating two small, snack-size portions of pistachios per day lowers vascular constriction when you are stressed, putting less pressure on your heart by further dilating your arteries. Along with this, the rhythmic, repetitive act of shelling pistachios can actually be quite therapeutic!

Green Leafy Vegetables – leafy, green vegetables should be a pivotal part of anyone's diet. Along with helping to combat stress, leafy greens are full of nutrients and antioxidants which help to fight off disease and leave your body feeling healthier and more energized. Dark leafy greens, for example spinach, are especially good for you since they are rich in folate, which helps your body to produce more mood-regulating neurotransmitters such as serotonin, which is a 'feel-good' chemical. Making leafy greens a part of your diet will help you to feel happier and less stressed out overall.

Fermented foods – last but not least, eating fermented foods such as yoghurt can help to keep your gut healthy, which actually in turn will help to improve your mental health and reduce stress levels. The beneficial bacteria which are found in fermented foods such as yoghurt actually have a direct effect

on your brain chemistry and transmit positive mood and behavior regulating signals to your brain via the vagus nerve.

Putting Together Your Diet Plan

Planning your meals wisely is key to not only staying physically fit and healthy, but also to staying mentally strong and being able to best manage your levels of stress. Knowing which foods to avoid and which are the best to reach for to snack on when you're feeling worried and anxious is important to helping you get control over your emotions and fears. When you're feeling stressed, you may be tempted to reach for classic 'comfort foods' – usually foods which are laden with sugar, very starchy, or greasy. However, although these foods can make you feel momentarily better, they will actually make you feel worse in the long run. Having stress-busting snacks such as fresh berries, dark chocolate, yoghurt, walnuts or pistachios, or even a fruit smoothie with avocado and leafy greens in it can help you to feel better in both the short and long term when it comes to stress.

When it comes to combating and dealing with stress in the long run, it's important to make sure that for the most part, you are eating a diet which is healthy and balanced. In order to stay on track, it's a good idea to make a meal plan for your week and plan ahead to make sure that you have a good selection of these

stress-busting foods in your kitchen to make meals and snacks from when you're feeling like stress-eating. Making sure that the majority of your meals include foods such as lean proteins and leafy green vegetables will not only make you feel healthier overall, but can improve your mental health and stress levels, too. A good example of a healthy, stress-busting menu would be:

Breakfast: Oatmeal with berries or a fruit smoothie with avocado and berries

Mid-morning snack: Natural yoghurt with fruit or a handful of pistachio nuts

Lunch: A pasta salad filled with plenty of leafy greens

Afternoon snack: Dark chocolate

Dinner: Grass-fed beef with vegetables

Before bed: Chamomile tea

Of course, you don't need to stick to this menu – but it gives you a good idea! Remember to exercise good portion control when eating foods such as nuts, chocolate, yoghurt or avocado!

As the saying goes, you are what you eat – so make sure that first and foremost, you're filling yourself up with foods which are good for your mental health.

2. Your Active Lifestyle

When you're feeling stressed out, exercising is probably the last thing on your mind. However, having a lifestyle which is active and participating in some sort of exercise regularly can actually help you to feel calmer and less stressed. Cardiovascular exercise has been proven to have a wide range of health benefits besides weight loss and increased fitness, and has been shown in studies to actually reduce the symptoms of depression. Because of this, taking part in regular exercise should be an important part of your lifestyle when it comes to dealing with your stress.

Best Stress-Busting Exercises

If you've ever been stressed out and went outside for a while to 'walk it off', you've probably found that this approach actually works. Exercise, no matter how gentle, can often be the best thing for stress and anxiety. Walking has been proven to have a number of huge physical and mental health benefits, so if you're not used to exercising a lot or don't want to join your local gym, there's nothing to worry about as simply going for a walk could be enough to help you feel better and clear your head.

If you've had a stressful day or something is really getting to you, getting out for a walk can be the best, quick-acting antidepressant. This is especially true if it's a nice day and you're getting some sunshine as well, as Vitamin D is absolutely crucial for mental health. Simply heading for a walk up the road or setting off to your local park to wander around for a while can help to take your mind off whatever is stressing you out, allow you to clear your head and put things into perspective – all of which can help you to manage your stress and deal with your stressors in a calm, collected manner. This is because walking, which is a simple exercise that most of us can easily do, releases endorphins, which create feelings of increased happiness and euphoria. So, if you're feeling like stress is taking over, hitting the pavements for ten minutes or taking your dog for a walk can be a quick solution.

Your Regular Routine

Whilst exercise can create a great 'quick fix' for those who are feeling anxious and stressed out, sticking to a regular exercise routine can actually help to improve symptoms in the long run.

Doctors recommend that people who are suffering from chronic stress, depression or anxiety to make sure that they get plenty of time in the gym. But, don't worry if you can't or don't want to join a gym or fitness center, as there are plenty of exercises which you can do from the comfort of your own home. For the best physical

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