

Reducing Stress through Diet

If you're going through a tough time, whether it's your job, personal relationships, or the state of the world, and your reaction is to use food for comfort, it's time to get some control back into your life. Here are some tips to get you started.

The ubiquitous stress is no longer a reaction or just a part of the bigger picture but rather has taken up the role of the cause. Stress is a major cause for the occurrence of most diseases—a fact long gone discovered—like diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular concerns, obesity and even cancer!

Reducing stress has been the cause célèbre among all medical practitioners, alternative healers and other health related professionals. Research in this area has been the long awaited impetus for alternative therapies like Yoga, Ayurveda, Naturopathy, Homeopathy and Acupressure/puncture. For most of us time is a tyrant and therefore, we find ourselves doing more than can be humanely managed. Taking it forward from here, stress can be defined as the emotional and physical strain caused by our response to pressure from the outside world.

Stress management has become one of the most common topics for seminars and workshops being conducted in corporates. Stress busters, a term often heard is associated with taking holidays, exercising, and most importantly eating right. Stress can be reflected in many different ways apart from overt physiological concerns; it can be reflected in the diet too.

Diet and stress share a deep dark relationship. When one is stressed they find themselves either, eating too much or not ingesting a morsel. For some, commonly referred to as 'the emotional eaters'—they eat to fill an emotional void or simply a reaction to stress, it becomes an addiction for example, chocolates, coffee, tea etc.

Diet not only contributes to increasing stress but also in reducing it. There is more than just body weight at stake here, the arteries, joints, bone density, blood pressure are all determined to some extent by the kind of diet one intakes.

A well balanced diet is one that is absent of certain foods and drinks that act as stressful stimulants to the body. The thing about these substances is that it provides temporary stimulation but can cause permanent damage.

1) Caffeine: Immediately crops to mind the almighty nectar—coffee. Caffeine is also found in a lot of the 'comfort foods' that we find ourselves indulging in such as tea, chocolate, aerated drinks, etc. Consumed in moderation, it can increase alertness and activity in the muscles, nervous system and heart. It has been suggested that there exists a link between caffeine intake and high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels. It is advisable to reduce caffeine intake but cutting



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it off abruptly can result in you experiencing withdrawal symptoms. Reduce the consumption slowly over a period of time. The next time you feel sleepy and lethargic instead of reaching out for that cup of coffee, take a walk or take deep breaths or try shifting focus on to a less monotonous activity.

2) Alcohol: Believe it or not but when taken in moderation, alcohol has been shown to benefit the cardiovascular system. However, alcohol is a major cause of stress but the irony remains that most people take to drinking as a way to combat stress. Alcohol and stress, in combination, are quite deadly. Alcohol stimulates the secretion of adrenaline resulting in concerns in the nervous tension, irritability and insomnia. Excess alcohol will increase the fat deposits in the heart and decrease the immune function. When stressed, the body produces several toxins; and in the absence of its filtering by the liver, these toxins continue to circulate through the body resulting in serious damage.

3) Smoking: Once again one of those substances that have temporary relief but permanent harm. Today all cigarette packets have a statutory warning sign on it highlighting its harmful effects. Many people use cigarettes as a coping mechanism. Cigarette smoking is shown to be responsible for a variety of cancers, hypertension, respiratory illness and heart disease.

4) Sugar: Empty calories are all that sugar has. After the initial boost of energy through the body, resulting possibly in the exhaustion of the adrenal glands, this can result in irritability, poor concentration, and depression. High sugar consumption puts a severe load on the pancreas and in turn increases possibility of developing diabetes. Keep your blood sugar constant by turning to sources of natural sugar like fruits, honey, root vegetables, etc.

5) Salt: Salt provides iodine to the body but at the same time it increases the blood pressure, depletes the adrenal glands, and causes emotional instability. Junk foods constitute of anything from biscuits, chips, pickles, etc. It is essential to avoid these since they contain more potassium rather than sodium.



6) Fat: Avoid the consumption of foods rich in saturated fats. Fats cause obesity and put unnecessary stress on the cardiovascular system. High fat is believed to cause breast, colon and prostate cancers.

Some of the other dos:

1) Eat a meal high in carbohydrates

Carbohydrates trigger a release of the brain neurotransmitter—serotonin—which has a calming effect. Some of the good sources of carbohydrates include rice, pasta, potatoes, breads, air-popped popcorn and low-cal cookies. Experts suggest that the carbohydrates present in a baked potato or a cup of spaghetti or white rice is enough to relieve the anxiety of a stressful day. But don't go overboard or else it will lead to lethargy.

2) Eat Food High In Fibre

Stress results in cramps and stomach ailments. Your meal should provide at least 25 grams of fibre per day. Fruits, vegetables and grains are excellent sources of fibre. For breakfast, eat whole fruits instead of just juice, and whole-grain cereals, porridge and fibre-fortified bread.

3) Exercise

Every time you find yourself reaching out for just one more cup of coffee or just one more biscuit, STOP! Rather lift yourself off your seat and take a walk not only will you burn some calories but you will end up delaying the hunger pang in turn you may find yourself not hungry anymore. Don't take the lift rather walk the stairs, one of the easiest ways to 'climb-up' the fitness ladder, in the comfort of your own workplace.