

# EATING for LESS STRESS: *DOs* and *DON'Ts*

Many people use food to cope with stress – or make less than ideal food choices when stressed. However, some foods can actually make stress worse – while on the other hand, some foods can help to decrease feelings of stress.

Keep these important points in mind:

- When under constant stress, the nervous system, responsible for both the stress response (fight-or-flight) and the relaxation response, gets taxed and nutrients needed for proper functioning can get depleted.
- Stress causes your body to increase blood sugar as a part of the fight-or-flight response, to give you fuel needed to react quickly. Constant stress can contribute to chronically high blood sugar levels and associated health problems.
- Low blood sugar can cause your mental, physical and emotional energy to decrease – making it that much harder to cope with any stress.

Here is a list of *DOs* and *DON'Ts* to help you Eat for Less Stress:

*DO:* PLAN YOUR MEALS AND SNACKS – you'll be less likely to grab a candy bar from the vending machine or hit a fast food joint if you plan ahead.

*DON'T:* SKIP BREAKFAST OR OTHER MEALS – Or you will run the risk of low blood sugar – as well as getting famished, which can lead to overeating later.

*DO:* CHOOSE CRUNCHY FOODS – Munching on an apple, carrots or celery sticks can help release tension in the jaw – and give you fiber, vitamins and minerals to boot!

*DON'T:* RUSH THROUGH YOUR MEALS – Taking time to savor your meals will improve digestion – and you may end up feeling satisfied with less food.

*DO:* LIMIT YOUR INTAKE OF SUGARS – Simple sugars and refined carbohydrates can cause rapid fluctuations in blood sugar – so watch your intake of sugary drinks, sweets, and foods made from white flour.

***DON'T:** GO LOW-CARB* – Complex carbohydrates help stabilize blood sugar and boost mood-regulating and stress-reducing chemicals in the brain – so make sure your diet contains plenty of whole grains.

***DO:** GET A MODERATE AMOUNT OF PROTEIN* – Protein helps stabilize blood sugar levels - think lean meats, eggs, nuts, seeds, and dairy products.

***DON'T:** SKIMP ON WATER* – Even mild dehydration can stress your entire body.

***DO:** CONSUME HEALTHY FATS* – They help to stabilize blood sugar levels and give you long term energy, and Omega-3 fatty acids are important for brain function – think nuts, seeds, avocados, flaxseed oil, and fatty fish.

***DON'T:** GO OVERBOARD ON CAFFEINE* – it stimulates the nervous system and can heighten the stress response; it can also sabotage sleep, which in turn can increase stress – so especially avoid caffeine after 2 pm.

***DO:** CONSUME PLENTY OF VITAMINS AND MINERALS* that keep your nervous and immune systems functioning well – such as Vitamin B6, Vitamin B12, Folate, Vitamin C, and Magnesium. While a general multi-vitamin and mineral supplement can help ensure you get enough of these, it's best to get them from a balanced diet full of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins and lowfat or nonfat dairy products.

***DON'T:** DEPEND ON ALCOHOL TO RELAX YOU* – Alcohol is a depressant and can aggravate stress.

***DO:** TRY DRINKING TEA* – Chamomile tea, and some other herbal and decaf teas, can help the body relax.

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## SNACKS for LESS STRESS

HUMMUS (protein, healthy fat) & CARROTS or PEPPERS (crunchy, vitamins)

APPLE (crunchy, vitamins) & PEANUT BUTTER (protein, healthy fat)

CHEESE (protein, minerals) & CRACKERS (crunchy, complex carbohydrate)

YOGURT (protein, minerals) & BERRIES (vitamins) & NUTS (protein, healthy fat)

TRAIL MIX: NUTS (protein, healthy fat) & CEREAL or CRACKERS (crunchy, complex carbohydrate, vitamins, minerals) & DRIED FRUIT (vitamins, minerals)