

From the Nutritionist

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Foods for Less Stress

Another semester is drawing to a close, which means that life is busy and it's easy to feel stressed out. The last thing most people think about when stressed is healthy eating. However, it's important to know that your food choices can actually help to decrease the amount of stress you feel.

Start your day with a good breakfast, then aim to eat a balanced meal or snack containing a mix of carbohydrate, protein and fat every 3-5 hours after that. Drink plenty of water and limit caffeine, which dehydrates your body and can exacerbate stress. To further decrease stress with nutrition, try incorporating these foods into your diet:

Berries — Full of antioxidants and phytonutrients, blueberries and other berries can help improve the body's physical reaction to stress.

Seeds — Pumpkin, flax, and sunflower seeds are great sources of magnesium, a mineral which can help decrease anxiety and help muscles relax.

Turkey — The tryptophan in turkey helps the body produce serotonin, a calming hormone. Tryptophan is also found in a number of other foods like nuts, seeds, tofu, fish, lentils, oats, beans and eggs.

Oatmeal — In addition to providing tryptophan, oatmeal is digested slowly, which can help stabilize both blood sugar and mood. Avoid presweetened oatmeal packets, which are full of sugar and can cause blood sugar fluctuations. Instead, start with plain oatmeal and flavor it with fresh or dried fruit, peanut butter, or seasonings like cinnamon or vanilla.

Leafy Greens — Spinach and other leafy greens are high in folate, which is involved in the production of dopamine in the brain, a pleasure-inducing chemical.

Milk — Milk is one of the most common sources of Vitamin D, which has been shown to boost happiness and reduce anxiety.

Pistachios — These nuts can help minimize the rise of heart rate and blood pressure during times of stress. Choose nuts with the shell on, as the repetitive task of shelling them can be very relaxing.

Yogurt — An easy source of probiotics which can help prevent stress-related digestive issues, yogurt also contains a good balance of protein and carbohydrate, especially if you choose Greek varieties. Look for those with lower amounts of added sugars.

Dark Chocolate — If you're one of the many people who crave chocolate when stressed, opt for dark chocolate, which contains antioxidants that may help decrease blood pressure, as well as other unique substances which may increase happiness.

Andrea Hart, registered dietitian nutritionist and New York State-certified dietitian/nutritionist, is available for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling and as a speaker or facilitator for campus groups, panels or classes.

Contact Andrea: andrea.hart@cortland.edu or call 607-753-5773 with questions or to set up an appointment. Or stop by her office, first floor, Neubig Hall, across from the Neubig Dining cashier.