

# FROM THE DIETITIAN'S DESK: ADDRESS YOUR STRESS



Often when we are under stress, we tend to reach for food (i.e. emotionally eat). Many people associate food with comfort because of childhood cues, like Mom's chicken soup or Grandma's grilled cheese. However, there are many other beneficial ways to handle stress that don't involve food and calories. Eating mindlessly in high stress situations can lead to guilt and more stress. Try one of the following tips instead of heading for the pantry when you feel over-stretched or highly stressed out at home or at work:

- Don't go straight for food during periods of intense stress. While it can bring a sense of immediate relief, there are other activities that are more productive and better proven to reduce stress. Here are a few options to choose from, or get creative (another stress reliever!) and think of your own:
  - Go for a walk
  - Jump rope (or faux jump rope, pretend to spin the rope while you jump)
  - Play with your pet
  - Take on a project, like sewing or tackling a puzzle
  - Meditate
  - Listen to music
  - Journal

Whatever you choose, try doing it for at least 10 minutes.

Here are a few more tips to reduce stress and prevent any added stress in your day:

- Tea time: Drinking tea can be a great way to relieve stress without extra calories. Find a calming tea like lavender or chamomile or a mint tea to calm your digestions, that you enjoy. For added benefit, sip your tea in a quiet place where you can practice mindfulness techniques or breathing meditation simultaneously.
- Clean your pantry: a person only has so much willpower in a day. A lot of that can be used dealing with stress at work. It doesn't help to come home to temptations of tasty treats in your house. Eliminate some unnecessary or less healthful items. Plan healthy snacks like carrot sticks and pea pods with cheese, yogurt dip, or peanut butter. So you have good options for when you walk in the door and need a snack.
- Nourish your body: having the right nutrients on board can give your body fighting power. Certain foods like fruits, vegetables, herbs and spices contain antioxidants. These can help your body reduce inflammation and fight stress.
- EAT! Enjoy a healthy breakfast, and always take time to eat lunch. Our bodies need fuel to think, move and deal with stress. Ever noticed how small stressors seem worse when you are really hungry? Our bodies can better handle stressful situations if we are properly fueled. Think protein, carbs and fat in combination with fruit and vegetables. A well-balanced diet is key!
- Help your hormones: Stress increases cortisol, a hormone known to promote fat production. Using the above tips and tools to reduce stress can help you create and maintain a healthy body and mind. This will lead to a more productive and happy lifestyle.
- Reduce caffeine intake: capping the caffeine at 2 cups per day and limiting intake after lunch can help you sleep better at night, in part by reducing adrenaline levels. Adrenaline is a fight or flight hormone, one that is intended to be released in a stressful situation. So while you might feel you need another cup of coffee to reduce stress, it may make you feel more jittery and anxious. Try a calming decaffeinated tea instead.

Did you know?? If left unmanaged, stress can make you sick! Consuming certain foods, particularly a variety of colors from fruits and vegetables, can boost your immunity and prevent illness.