



Why Comfort Food Adds More Stress *to Your Body*

Stress affects our nutrition and vice versa. Stress can also have an effect on the immune system. This article will explain the effects that stress has on our eating habits and how choosing the right foods can strengthen our immune system while facing stress.

The body is depleted of nutrition. When you are stressed, the body uses more nutrients than it would normally use when it is resting; this is because the body kicks into “fight or flight” mode. Vital nutrients such as magnesium, calcium, potassium, zinc, and copper are used by the body in fifteen different metabolic processes. If these critical nutrients are depleted, the body’s metabolism will not have adequate “fuel” to function properly.

Unhealthy “quick fixes.” Stress results in an increased consumption of comfort foods, junk foods and processed foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar. Most of these foods are found in fast food restaurants, vending machines, frozen meals, or takeout. These foods are usually packed with processed sugar, salt, fats, and other substances that wreak havoc on your body. Foods that contain mostly refined sugar, processed flour or white flours, salt, and caffeine trigger the release of epinephrine and norepinephrine into the bloodstream, which increase your heart rate, blood pressure and metabolic activity. Poor food choices trigger the body’s stress response even further and can suppress the immune system.

The immune system compromised. There are specific foods that can compromise your immune system. These are foods that are high in saturated fat because this type of fat cannot be taken into the bloodstream easily. As a result of a high saturated fat diet, the body has to work harder to break down these foods, which puts undue stress on the body. In addition, foods that are high in refined sugar can compromise the immune system because it causes a decrease in white blood cells, which affects the functionality of the immune system. In essence, the more refined sugar an individual consumes, the more the immune system is suppressed.

Although stress cannot simply be eliminated from our lives, following a nutrition guideline can help you adopt practical eating behaviors that will enhance the immune system when the body is under stress. When implementing these guidelines, please keep in mind that there is not a one-size-fits-all diet, as each individual has a different physiology. The low-stress diet does not focus on losing weight although that may certainly happen. The strategies are intended to help individuals keep their immune system functioning optimally when dealing with stress.

(continued)





Geoffrey Gomez,
Health Net
We're here to support
your health goals.

The low-stress diet

1. Eat a variety of food colors

Researchers discovered that bioflavonoids, the compounds that give fruits and vegetables their color and antioxidant properties, help the body fight cancer or the growth of cancer cells. Antioxidants counteract the dangerous effects of free radicals. Free radicals are oxygen molecules, and when they enter the body, they work hard to destroy the healthy cells and vital cell structures. Red peppers, blue berries, carrots, golden beets, and green leafy vegetables are some examples for a healthy range.

2. Reduce caffeine consumption

Caffeine tends to trigger the stress response. If you are stressed, excessive caffeine consumption can make it worse. The caffeine will not only elevate your heart rate, but after the caffeine crash, you may be craving more caffeine and sugar for energy. Caffeine is not only in coffee, but in sodas and chocolate. Instead, try drinking more water for a quick energy boost. Studies have shown that being dehydrated can cause the feeling of fatigue and sluggishness. You can tell if you're hydrated if you don't feel thirsty and your urine is light-colored.

Source: www.welcoa.org

3. Incorporate fresh herbs and spices into your foods

Fresh herbs and spices do not only provide your food with delicious flavor, but they also have antimicrobial properties. These properties kill or inhibit the growth of microorganisms such as bacteria and fungi.

4. Consume an adequate amount of fiber

The World Health Organization recommends that individuals consume between 30 to 40 grams of fiber a day. However, the average American tends to eat less than 8 grams of fiber a day. Why is fiber so important? Fiber acts as a broom that cleans out the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. When individuals do not get enough fiber in their diet, they are not sweeping their GI tract, which can be problematic and can lead to a higher risk for colon cancer.



5. Include omega-3s in your diet

The human body cannot naturally make omega-3 oils – The body must receive it through external resources. Certain eggs, fish and flaxseed are all great sources of omega-3s. Inflammation is the major symptom in people who do not get enough omega-3s in their diet, which can have a negative effect on the entire body.

