

Best Stress-Fighting Foods

To which I reacted, "Good!" You should eat when you're stressed it's our bodies' natural reaction to want to store calories to face whatever challenge is causing the stress in the first place. The key, however, is to eat what your body wants - the foods that actually counteract the effects of stress, and make you stronger (and leaner) when the tough times pass. So next time anxiety runs high, be sure to grab one of these seven stress-fighting foods.

Papaya

Wouldn't it be awesome if there was a magic nutrient that could stop the flow of stress hormones - the very hormones that make your body superefficient at storing fat calories? Wouldn't you want to gobble that food up like crazy, especially if it tasted great? Half a medium papaya carries nearly 75 percent more vitamin C than an orange, and provides potent protection against stress. Researchers at the University of Alabama found 200 milligrams of vitamin C - about as much as you'll find in one large papaya - twice a day nearly stopped the flow of stress hormones in rats. It should work for you, too.



Other smart sources of vitamin C: Red bell peppers, broccoli, oranges

Peppermint Tea

The mere scent of peppermint helps you focus and boosts performance, according to researchers. Another study discovered that peppermint tea makes drivers more alert and less anxious.

Other smart sources of peppermint: Peppermint candy and peppermint oil



Pumpkin Seeds

Pumpkin seeds are loaded with stress-busting potential thanks to high levels of magnesium. Only about 30 percent of us meet our daily magnesium requirements, placing the rest of us at a higher risk for stress symptoms such as headaches, anxiety, tension, fatigue, insomnia, nervousness and high blood pressure. (Basically we're frayed wires, and magnesium is the electrical tape that can pull us back together.) A quarter cup of pumpkin seeds gives you half your day's magnesium requirements.



Other smart sources of magnesium: Spinach, Swiss chard, black beans, soybeans, salmon

Avocados

The healthy fats buried in the avocado's flesh make it an ideal choice when you're craving something rich and creamy. The reasons? Monounsaturated (healthy) fatty acids, and potassium--both of which help combat high blood pressure. Avocado fat is 66 percent monounsaturated, and gram-for-gram, the green fruit has about 35 percent more potassium than a banana. Whip up a fresh guacamole or slice a few slivers over toast and top with fresh ground pepper.



Other smart sources of potassium: Squash, papaya, spinach, bananas, lentils

Salmon

Not only does omega-3 fat protect against heart disease and cognitive decline, but according to a study from *Diabetes & Metabolism*, the wonder fat is also responsible for maintaining healthy levels of cortisol. And what's the world's best source of omega-3s? Salmon. But there's another trick in salmon's arsenal - a sleep-promoting amino acid called tryptophan. One salmon filet has as much tryptophan as you need in an entire day, and if there's one remedy for stress, it's a good night of blissful Zs.

Other smart sources of omega-3 fats: Flaxseeds, walnuts, sardines, halibut

Other smart sources of tryptophan: Chicken, tuna, beef, soybeans

Almonds

The almond's first stress-buster is the aforementioned monounsaturated fats, but at risk of belaboring that point, let's look at another almond-centered, mind-calming nutrient: vitamin E. In one study, Belgium researchers treated pigs with a variety of nutrients just before sticking them in a transportation simulator (basically a vibrating crate). After 2 hours of simulation, only those pigs treated with tryptophan and vitamin E had non-elevated levels of stress hormones. Almonds, thankfully, are loaded with vitamin E. To reach your day's requirement from almonds alone, you need to eat about 40 to 50 nuts. Or you can mix them with other vitamin-E rich foods to save calories and add more dietary variety.



Other smart sources of vitamin E: Sunflower seeds, olives, spinach, papaya

Oatmeal

A biochemical effect of stress is a depleted stock of serotonin, the hormone that makes you feel cool, calm, and in control. One reliable strategy for boosting serotonin back to healthy levels is to increase your intake of carbohydrates. That said, scarfing down Ding Dongs and doughnuts isn't a sustainable solution. Rather, to induce a steady flow of serotonin, aim to eat fiber-rich, whole-grain carbohydrates. The slower rate of digestion will keep serotonin production steady and prevent the blood sugar roller-coaster that leads to mood swings and mindless eating.



Other sources of fiber-rich carbohydrates: Quinoa, barley, whole-wheat bread, Triscuits

By David Zinczenko (Aug 20, 2010)