

# “I feel stressed so much of the time. Can my eating habits affect my stress level?”

Healthy eating plays a large role in your ability to handle stress.



The right nutrients are important for one’s physical, mental and emotional well-being. The tips below focus on using proper nutrition to reduce the symptoms of stress.

## Making healthy choices

- Stress can weaken the immune system. Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables which provide essential vitamins and minerals for energy production.
- Avoid or limit processed foods that are high in fat, sugar and sodium.
- Pack healthy lunches and plan meals ahead of time to avoid eating fast foods.
- Pack snack bags with healthy portions of fruits, veggies and nuts.
- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated. Dehydration can cause fatigue, irritability and poor concentration.
- Limit food and drinks containing caffeine such as coffee, tea, soda and chocolate. Caffeine may cause you to feel jittery, which can make stressful situations seem more intense.
- If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to two drinks a day if you’re a man and one drink a day if you’re a woman. Try to avoid turning to alcohol as a way to relieve stress.
- Do not skip meals, as this can worsen the symptoms of stress. Headaches, loss of concentration and fatigue will increase physical and mental stress when a body lacks the proper nutrients.
- Practice mindful eating. Eat away from your desk at work and away from the TV, computer or other distractions at home. Eating on the go may cause heartburn or indigestion.
- Avoid turning to food in stressful situations. Overeating can lead to feelings of guilt. Replace eating with stress-relieving activities, such as taking a walk, playing with a pet or taking a bath.

## Signs of emotional eating

- You have started to gain weight and don't know why.
- You've become a compulsive eater with uncontrollable desires to eat more food than usual when under pressure, worried or anxious.
- You can't find foods that satisfy your cravings, and therefore you eat after you're full.
- You're eating without even thinking about portions or nutrients.
- You have feelings of guilt after eating and are not even sure how much you ate.
- You use food as a reward to make yourself feel better.

## How to stop emotional eating

- Recognize when you're eating when you're not hungry. There are many comfort foods that lift our moods temporarily, only to make us feel sad, depressed or more stressed later on.
- Don't use food as a reward or to distract you from the problems you are facing.
- Listen to your body. Learn to recognize when you're hungry and full to avoid overeating.
- Be conscious of your food choices when you're under stress. Emotional eating can lead to weight gain or prevent you from meeting your weight loss goals. This adds unnecessary stress to your daily life.
- Keep a journal. Write down what you eat, when you eat and what your mood is. You can use this information to identify patterns of stress eating and learn how to change bad habits.
- Stop and take a minute to think about whether you're hungry, stressed or bored. Take a short walk, call a friend or perform breathing exercises. You may find the desire to eat goes away.

