

*I wake....with good intention to be the best version of me today. I have things to achieve, people to see, jobs to do...then I remember Covid-19 and it's effect on our lifestyle, on our families, our jobs, our freedom and our relationships at home and at work. We feel like everything has changed. It has. Our anticipated grief for what is happening and what is to come is overwhelming.*

*While we can't control what is going on out there...we can only do our best to control how we are responding.*

*Our coping mechanism and our very best attempt to take care of ourselves, for those around us.*

*In times of stress, we tend to focus just on "getting through it" or "getting to the other side". With this current climate, we have to settle in for the long haul ...perhaps 6 months. We simply cannot live in a period of acute stress, when, by definition, this could be chronic stress.*

*Below is some information about what stress can do to our appetites, how we can eat and choose foods that will help with stress and why we are attracted to foods that seemingly increase our stress.*



## Stress and its Effects on Appetite

In the short term, stress can shut down appetite.

A structure in the brain called the hypothalamus excretes corticotropin-releasing hormone, which suppresses appetite.

The brain also sends messages to the adrenal glands near the kidneys to pump out the hormone epinephrine (also known as adrenaline). Epinephrine helps trigger the body's fight-or-flight response, a revved-up physiological state that temporarily puts eating on hold.....This is why some people seem to get thin during stressful periods.....but.....

If stress persists — or is perceived as persisting — it's a different story. The adrenal glands release another hormone called cortisol, and cortisol increases appetite and may also ramp up motivation in general, including the motivation to eat!!!! Once a stressful episode is over, cortisol levels should fall, but if the stress doesn't go away (we don't take the time to settle or rest— or if a person's stress response gets stuck in the "on" position) — cortisol may stay elevated. Both an excess and deficiency of cortisol can impact blood sugar levels and thyroid function, trigger weight fluctuation and slow metabolism.

Stress also seems to affect food preferences. Numerous studies have shown that physical or emotional distress increases the intake of food high in fat, sugar, or both. High cortisol levels, in combination with high insulin levels, may be responsible.

Once ingested, fat- and sugar-filled foods seem to have a feedback effect that inhibits activity in the parts of the brain that produce and process stress and related emotions. So, part of our stress-induced craving for those foods may be that they counteract stress.

Of course, overeating isn't the only stress-related behaviour that is concerning. Stressed people lose sleep, exercise less, and drink more alcohol, all of which can contribute to becoming overweight, and of course, the circle of stress continuing.

Stress might seem harmless, but it's anything but. While short-term stress can lead to bothersome headaches, stomach cramps, weight gain, and more bouts of cold and flu, chronic, unrelenting stress impacts every part of your body, from your digestive and reproductive systems to your immune system.

Left unaddressed, chronic stress can even increase your risk for conditions such as obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, depression. Mental Health is an issue on the forefront of this pandemic.

### **But why Does Eating Make Me feel Happy?**

With our brains, chemicals and neurotransmitters are affected by messages our brain receives from the body. Think of it as a key and lock.

When our body sends a message, a neurotransmitter, the “key,” is responsible for connecting it to the “lock” within our brain to complete the message so our body and mind know what to do and how to respond to the message.



The areas in our brain that help with regulation of eating, hunger, and cues, signal dopamine to be released. This creates a sensation of good feelings, and positive reinforcement.

With this process, we are able to continue what behaviour we did to 'feel good' again. It is part survival, and part sensory when we eat.

So for us, with our chronic stress, caused by the effects of the pandemic, we are lacking in dopamine....because we don't get to do the things we normally do like, go out for dinner with friends, go bowling, to the movies, play netball, sunbake on the beach, go shopping..need I go on?

We need our dopamine from somewhere and our body knows a quick way to get it, eating.

Problem is, people may be making their stress worse by taking that very action. That's because diet choices can make or break your stress levels.

Let's put it this way: Those cookies and potato chips aren't doing you any favours. Ali Miller, RD, CDE, an integrative dietitian and author of *The Anti-Anxiety Diet*, says that refined carbs such as these spike blood sugar and then cause it to crash, increasing stress and anxiety. But choosing healthy foods — including healthy fats such as avocado, eggs, and walnuts — has the opposite effect, creating a “favourable hormone signalling in the brain, which supports satiety, mood regulation, sleep and energy balance,” Miller says.

An urge to make a beeline for the fridge when stress is sky-high isn't your fault. When you're stressed, your body pumps out hormones that rev your appetite and send your cravings for unhealthy comfort foods soaring. Meanwhile, stress can lead to a loss of lean muscle mass, which decreases your metabolism and increases your risk for weight gain.

Of course, that's just part of the equation. From sleep, diet, and exercise, to work, family, and romantic relationships, stress can take a toll on every aspect of your life.

To help you fight your stress, here is a food list and an idea of a plan that's specifically balanced to meet all of your nutritional needs while calming stress hormones, increasing feel-good hormones, and keeping energy high.

Preparing healthy food may be the last thing you want to do when you're pressed for time and strung out. But please use your time to prioritise this.

## What sort of things should I choose?

### Warm, Soothing Foods

For conquering stress, a food's nutrient profile might be just as important as how it makes you feel. Take a calming, warm cup of tea.. There's the soothing effect of sipping a warm drink, regardless of the flavour — but certain herbs have been shown to have a relaxing effect on their own. . For example, chamomile may reduce anxiety by helping rewire the body's stress response, and increasing production of the feel-good hormones serotonin and dopamine.

A warm soup...even the act of how slow you eat it is calming. I like soups that are rich in healing nutrients such as sweet potato, pumpkin and carrot...see below for recipe

### Dark Chocolate

Usually, dessert isn't a good choice when you're stressed, but dark chocolate may be an exception. This treat could help reduce stress in two ways — via its chemical impact and its emotional impact. Chocolate feels like such an indulgence that it can be a real treat. Have a piece of it, and that feeling alone can help reduce stress. Dark chocolate is also rich in antioxidants

### Whole-Grain Carbohydrates

The right carbs can act as stress busters! Carbohydrates can increase levels of serotonin, a chemical in the body that helps boost mood and reduce stress. More serotonin means more concentration and a more productive workday. But choosing the right carbs is critical. Refined carbs — such as chips, cookies, and crackers — are tied to inflammation, stress, and depression. These carbs may also raise your blood pressure, straining your heart health, and lead you to overeat later in the day.

Complex carbs, on the other hand, can do wonders for your stress levels because they digest more slowly and keep blood sugar levels more even. Sources of complex carbs include sweet potatoes and whole grains (such as whole-grain bread, quinoa, brown rice, and steel-cut or old-fashioned oats).

## **Bananas**

For a quick pick-me-up have a banana instead of coffee. The potassium-rich fruit contains the mood-boosting chemical dopamine, along with magnesium, levels of which decrease during stressful times. Bananas are furthermore a rich source of certain B vitamins, such as vitamin B6 which helps the nervous system run correctly, and can decrease stress and fatigue.

## **Fatty Fish**

Filling up on fatty fish can help strengthen your heart and boost your mood. Heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids in whole fish like tuna, salmon, and sardines may help ease depression. Easy to digest and full of protein, this fish can help lower overall stress and anxiety.

## **Water**

Looking for a quick and simple way to ease stress? Fill your cup with water and sip away! The importance of hydration during

stressful times is well-documented. Even mild dehydration can increase cortisol levels, which contributes to increased stress. While drinking enough water will not make your stressors vanish, taking this step will help set your body up to handle stress when it does occur....try to get 2.5 litres a day and start as soon as you get up.

## **Milk**

Your mum was onto something when she made you drink all your milk at the dinner table. Turns out, calcium might not only strengthen your bones — it could also brighten your mood. Milk and other dairy with calcium and added Vitamin D can help muscles relax and stabilize mood..you already know how the Vitamin D from the sun makes you feel happy.

## **Nuts**

Nuts are a plus to your health in more ways than one. First, they're satiating, meaning they can help ward off unhealthy cravings. Second, they could help lower blood pressure.. And third, their B vitamins have been shown to help lower stress levels. Just remember to reach for only a small handful, as nuts are calorie dense and can lead to weight gain if you eat too many.

## **Oranges and Other Vitamin C-Rich Fruits**

Vitamin C will not only ward off colds— the nutrient can also help keep stress at bay. Studies have found that when people took slow released vitamin C, their cortisol levels, and overall stress, decreased. Eating citrus fruits, including oranges, capsicum, and strawberries is a good start, but always check with your Dr before taking supplements.

## **Avocados**

Avocados are packed with healthy monounsaturated fats, vitamin C, vitamin B6, potassium, and fibre, making for a perfect stress-fighting snack. As mentioned, vitamins C and B6 can help reduce stress, and the fruit's potassium may help lower blood pressure. Not to mention, the healthy fat and fibre in avocados can help contribute to satiety, discouraging you from unhealthy snacking when you're stressed.

## **Leafy Greens**

You might think salads are boring, but for lowering stress, they may be one of the best choices you can make at lunchtime. Leafy-green vegetables, such as spinach and kale, as well as other raw fruits and veggies, are stress-busting powerhouses. As a rich source of magnesium, leafy greens can help regulate cortisol and blood pressure levels. Plus, green leafy veggies contain folate, which plays a key role in the production of the feel-good chemical dopamine.....I literally eat a bowl of roasted kale every day. It definitely is my favourite thing.

## **Ok, so what should I avoid?**

Of course, not all foods are good for stress levels. In fact, some foods (or too much of them) may actually make matters worse. Knowing what to put on your plate is just as important as knowing what to skip for lower stress levels.

## **Caffeine**

Your cup of latte may sabotage your stress levels. It comes down to volume and timing. I know that for me, when I am stressed, it only seems to make me more stressed. Caffeine doesn't actually GIVE you energy, it is a stimulant. It basically rapes your adrenal glands and gives you the 'feeling' of energy. There's nothing wrong with a couple of cups of a caffeinated beverage earlier in the day, but skip it after noon, as it can interfere with sleep. Too

much can make you feel anxious and more stressed than you actually are.

## **Alcohol**

Be mindful of your alcohol intake, as it could similarly help or hurt your stress levels. If you have any tendency to overdo it, alcohol is a bad idea. When stress is an ongoing issue and someone continues to turn to alcohol to calm their nerves, it can actually contribute to a feeling of depression and make stress more difficult to manage in the long term. Also remember it's better to abstain from alcohol if you're feeling depressed or think you lean on it too much.

## **Refined Sugar**

Refined sugar, which is the kind in cookies, cakes, and lollies, causes blood sugar to soar and then quickly drop (often described as a "crash"). This is the opposite of what you need when your stress levels are high and your energy levels are low.

## **Now...a stress- free grocery list.**

I am sorry, but even the grocery shopping is stressful these days. The simpler the list, the easier this will be. Make this list and you can add to it what you want and use it as a basic.

## **Pantry**

- Olive Oil
- Whole grains (brown rice, whole-grain pasta, quinoa)

- Oats (old-fashioned or steel-cut)
- Dark chocolate (60% cacao or greater)
- Unsalted nuts (especially almonds, walnuts, cashews, and pistachios)
- Seeds (pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, flaxseed, chia seed etc.)
- Decaf tea (especially black, green, and chamomile)

### **Fresh**

- Fatty fish (salmon, tuna, mackerel, trout, and sardines)
- Milk
- Yogurt
- Sweet potatoes
- Leafy greens
- Avocados
- Berries
- Oranges
- Red capsicum
- Bananas

While it is important to focus on these foods, it is equally important to look at ways you can reduce stress and calm yourself throughout the day.

You would already know that stress is accumulative and after one thing and then another, something small will cause a meltdown. Try to find time to meditate, or deep breathing, yoga, walking, listening to beautiful music, dancing, laughing. Find things to be

grateful for every day. Sometimes they are just hidden ...but they are there.....

Below is a sample of how to eat all of the stress busting foods in a day. The nutrients in these ingredients will support health and provide nutrients will benefit you.

<b>Day 1</b>
<b>Breakfast:</b> Old-fashioned oats with milk; blueberries and mixed, unsalted nuts
<b>Lunch:</b> Turkey-and-avocado lettuce wrap
<b>Snack:</b> An orange and pistachios
<b>Dinner:</b> Salmon with broccoli and brown rice
<b>Dessert:</b> A glass of warm milk with honey

<b>Day 2</b>
<b>Breakfast:</b> Plain yoghurt with cherries and unsalted almonds
<b>Lunch:</b> carrot sweet potato, pumpkin soup
<b>Snack:</b> chocolate brownie smoothie

**Dinner:** Chicken and veggie stir-fry over brown rice

**Dessert:** two squares of dark chocolate

### Day 3

**Breakfast:** 2 eggs (any style) and a slice of whole-grain toast

**Lunch:** A salad topped with chicken and avocado

**Snack:** Carrot sticks and hummus

**Dinner:** chicken tacos

**Dessert:** A cup of decaf tea with honey

### Day 4

**Breakfast:** Overnight oats with cacao powder, peanut butter, and banana

**Lunch:** Quinoa and black bean salad

**Snack:** Air-popped popcorn

**Dinner:** Grilled chicken with sweet potato mash and beans

**Dessert:** Berries with yoghurt

## Day 5

**Breakfast:** Whole-grain pancakes with fresh berries

**Lunch:** Chicken and veggie wrap

**Snack:** Kale chips

**Dinner:** Tuna sushi rolls with brown rice

**Dessert:** Avocado-chocolate pudding

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## CARROT, SWEET POTATO AND PUMPKIN SOUP

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- 2 kg combo of pumpkin, sweet potato and carrot peeled and cut into 2cm pieces
- 4 garlic cloves
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- 1 L vegetable stock. low sodium ..or I use a bone broth
- 500 ml water
- Coconut yoghurt to serve

### Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 200°C and line 2 baking trays with parchment paper.
2. Peel your vegetables and chop into small cubes. Arrange on the baking trays along with the (unpeeled) garlic cloves and drizzle with olive oil.
3. Season with salt and pepper and roast the vegetables for 30 minutes until the edges are browned.
4. Once the vegetables have roasted, add them to a large pot along with the stock, water and turmeric. Remove the garlic from their skin and squeeze it into the pot too.
5. Simmer the soup mixture and cook covered for 15 minutes.
6. Remove from heat and allow to cool slightly, then blitz with an immersion blender until smooth.
7. Serve with a dollop of coconut yoghurt.

### Notes

Remove and rinse the pumpkin seeds, then toast them in the oven with a little olive oil whilst you cook the soup on the stovetop. They should be browned and crunchy in 5-10 minutes and make a great soup topping!

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## CHOCOLATE BROWNIE SMOOTHIE

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serves 2

### INGREDIENTS

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1 FROZEN BANANA  
1 TABLESPOON CACAO POWDER  
2 CUPS MILK OF CHOICE  
1 TABLESPOON PROTEIN POWDER  
1 HANDFUL OF SPINACH  
1 TABLESPOON OF MAPLE SYRUP

### DIRECTIONS

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Place all ingredients in the blender to mix and then pour in your bottle or glass. You can make this like a mousse if you just halve the milk amount (it will be a lot smaller though!)



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