

Eating Tips for Easing Stress

- ❖ **Eat breakfast.** The first meal of the day shifts our bodies from the resting state to an active state. Research shows that “breakfast eaters” are more alert at school and work, ingest more vitamins and minerals, and have lower body weights. A recent study in the UK found that eating breakfast was associated with lower levels of the stress hormone, cortisol. Don't be skimpy - eat at least 25% of your daily calories (400 - 600) at breakfast. Good choices include: whole grain cereal with skim milk, nuts and fruit; whole wheat toast and peanut butter plus 100% juice or milk; 1 - 2 eggs, whole wheat toast and yogurt.



- ❖ **Make your home, car and work place “healthy-eating” environments.** Refined and processed foods are usually high in fat, sugar, calories and salt with few vitamins and minerals. Replace chips, snack crackers, cookies and candy with fresh veggies and fruit, low-fat popcorn, instant oatmeal, string cheese & whole grain crackers, yogurt and canned soup with veggies. Try and avoid the vending machines - they contain high calorie, less satisfying, expensive snacks!



- ❖ **Drink healthy.** Consuming regular pop, sugary fruit drinks and smoothies, coffee drinks made with whole milk and sugary flavorings and alcoholic beverages (beer, wine or hard liquor) can add a lot of calories with little nutrition + caffeine. You may be on a “sugar or caffeine high” briefly but this will be followed by a “sluggish low”. Your best drink choices are water, fat-free or low-fat milk, black or green teas and plain lattes or cappuccinos made with low-fat milk and decaf espresso. Alcohol is a depressant and may adversely alter your mood. If you do drink alcohol, do so in moderation - **no more than** 1 drink for women or 2 drinks for men daily. 1 drink = 12 oz. beer, 5 oz. wine or 1-1/2 oz. of hard liquor.



- ❖ **Make your diet colorful.** Fill up on colorful vegetables and fruits. These foods are filling, low calorie and full of healthy disease-fighting nutrients. The bright colors in fruits and vegetables (red, orange, yellow and green) are the different phytochemicals in these foods. Phytochemicals are naturally occurring plant compounds (such as

antioxidants) that help prevent cancer, heart disease and the effects of stress and boost your immune system. Your goal is to eat at least 2 servings of fruit and 3 servings of veggies daily.



❖ **Choose your fats wisely.** Omega-3 fatty acids are "healthy" fats. They can combat inflammation in the body and may decrease the symptoms of depression. Good sources are fatty fish (salmon, tuna, mackerel, herring, sardines), walnuts, flaxseeds and canola and soy oils. Replace saturated fats with monounsaturated & omega-3 fats. Eat 1 - 2 fish meals per week, 1 oz. nuts 4 - 5 times per week and cook with canola, olive and soy oils.

❖ **Don't skip meals!** You need fuel coming in all day long to make you feel energized and alert. Eat three small to moderate sized meals per day plus a few snacks (mini meals) if needed. Food restriction leads to excess cortisol (stress hormone) release and diminished serotonin production. Skipping meals generally leads to **over**-eating later in the day or evening.

❖ **Make eating a pleasurable experience.** Too often we eat in a rush and never experience the pleasure of eating. Eat mindfully - always put your food on a plate and eat sitting down, NOT in front of the TV or computer. Try and eat at a relaxed pace so you can experience the sensual qualities of food (aroma, taste, texture and temperature). Eat when you are "gently hungry" rather than "frantically hungry" so you can slow your pace and savor each bite. Only eat what you really like rather than eating something just because it's there. Dining is more than consuming food - enjoy spending time with others!



❖ **Be active every day.** Walk or bike to your destinations as much as possible, take the stairs, check out the campus recreation center or join a walking group. Thirty to forty-five minutes of moderate activity **daily** will decrease stress levels and elevate your mood.



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