

Wellness

Wednesday



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Stressed Out? Dietitians Say You Should Stock Up On These Foods.

As we transition into the fall season, many of us experience a shift in our routines and responsibilities. The crisp air signals the return of busier schedules, and with it often comes an increase in stress levels. Whether it's the demands of work, family commitments, or even the anticipation of upcoming holidays, it's essential to effectively manage this stress. One surprisingly powerful tool at our disposal is our diet. Certain foods can play a significant role in alleviating stress and promoting mental well-being. We'll explore a variety of foods that can help you combat stress, backed by insights from registered dietitians.



Understanding Stress and Its Effects

Stress is a natural response to challenges and demands in our lives. However, chronic stress can lead to various health issues, including anxiety, depression, and physical ailments. Recognizing the impact of stress on our bodies is important for managing it successfully.

The Physiological Impact of Stress

When faced with stress, our bodies release hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. While these hormones can be beneficial in short bursts, prolonged exposure can disrupt various bodily functions:

- **Immune System Suppression:** Chronic stress can weaken the immune system, making us more susceptible to illnesses.
- **Sleep Disruption:** Elevated stress levels often lead to insomnia or disrupted sleep patterns.
- **Digestive Issues:** Stress can affect digestion, leading to issues like bloating, constipation, or diarrhea.

Psychological Consequences

The mental toll of stress is equally significant. It can lead to:

- **Increased Anxiety:** A constant state of worry can escalate into anxiety disorders.
- **Mood Swings:** Stress can cause irritability and mood fluctuations, impacting relationships.
- **Decreased Productivity:** Difficulty concentrating and making decisions can hinder performance at work or school.

Understanding these effects highlights the importance of managing stress proactively, and diet can be a vital part of that strategy.

Foods That Help Alleviate Stress

Incorporating specific foods into your diet can help mitigate the effects of stress. Here are some key foods that nutritionists recommend for stress relief.

1. Pumpkin Seeds

Pumpkin seeds are not just a seasonal snack; they are packed with magnesium, a mineral known for its calming properties.

- **Benefits:** Magnesium helps regulate neurotransmitters that promote a sense of calm and can also lower cortisol levels.
- **Serving Size:** A one-ounce serving of pumpkin seeds contains about 156 milligrams of magnesium, which is a significant contribution toward the daily recommended intake of 300-400 milligrams for adults.

2. Fatty Fish

Fish, particularly salmon and tuna, are excellent sources of omega-3 fatty acids.

- **Benefits:** Omega-3s are known to reduce inflammation and support brain health. They can also enhance serotonin production, which helps regulate mood.
- **Serving Size:** A typical serving of salmon (3 to 4 ounces) provides around 1.2 grams of omega-3s, close to the recommended daily intake of 1.6 grams for adults.

3. Leafy Greens

Vegetables like kale and spinach are powerhouse foods for both physical and mental health.

- **Benefits:** These greens are rich in folate and antioxidants, which can support brain function and mitigate stress levels. They also contain tryptophan, an amino acid that aids serotonin production.
- **Serving Size:** One cup of raw kale offers about 13 micrograms of folate, contributing to the daily recommendation of 400 micrograms.



4. Citrus Fruits

Citrus fruits, particularly oranges, are not only refreshing but also beneficial for stress relief.

- **Benefits:** High in vitamin C, these fruits can help lower cortisol levels and combat oxidative stress in the body.
- **Serving Size:** An eight-ounce glass of 100% orange juice provides 124 milligrams of vitamin C, meeting the daily requirement of 70-90 milligrams for adults.

5. Nuts

Nuts like almonds and walnuts are excellent snacks for stress relief.

- **Benefits:** They are rich in healthy fats, magnesium, and antioxidants, all of which contribute to better mental health.
- **Serving Size:** A handful of almonds (about one ounce) can provide 76 milligrams of magnesium, supporting a calming effect on the body.

The Role of Hydration

While food plays a crucial role in managing stress, hydration is equally important. Dehydration can lead to fatigue and irritability, making it harder to cope with stress.

Importance of Water

- **Cognitive Function:** Staying hydrated helps maintain optimal brain function, which is vital for managing stress.
- **Mood Regulation:** Even mild dehydration can affect mood and energy levels, leading to increased feelings of stress.

Herbal Teas

In addition to water, herbal teas can be a soothing option.

- **Chamomile:** Known for its calming properties, chamomile tea can help reduce anxiety and promote better sleep.
- **Peppermint:** This tea can aid digestion and provide a refreshing break during stressful moments.

Foods to Avoid During Stress

While certain foods can help alleviate stress, others can exacerbate it. Being mindful of what you consume is just as important.

1. Caffeine

Excessive caffeine can lead to increased heart rate and anxiety.

- **Impact:** For some individuals, caffeine can overstimulate the nervous system, making it harder to relax.
- **Alternatives:** Consider switching to lower-caffeine beverages like herbal teas or matcha.

2. Sugary Foods

Foods high in added sugars can provide a temporary sense of comfort but often lead to crashes in energy and mood.

- **Impact:** Consuming sugary snacks can increase feelings of anxiety and stress over time.
- **Alternatives:** Opt for natural sugars found in fruits to satisfy your sweet tooth.

3. Processed Foods

Highly processed foods often lack essential nutrients and can contribute to inflammation.

- **Impact:** A diet high in processed foods has been linked to increased stress and anxiety levels.
- **Alternatives:** Focus on whole, nutrient-dense foods to support overall well-being.

Mindful Eating Practices

In addition to choosing the right foods, how you eat can also impact your stress levels. Practicing mindful eating can enhance your relationship with food and improve your overall mental health.

- **Eliminate Distractions:** Turn off screens and focus on your meal.
- **Savor Each Bite:** Take the time to chew thoroughly and enjoy the flavors of your food.
- **Listen to Your Body:** Pay attention to hunger cues and eat when you're genuinely hungry.

The Importance of a Balanced Diet

While specific foods can help reduce stress, a balanced diet is essential for overall mental health. Incorporating a variety of nutrients will support your body's ability to cope with stress.

Key Nutrients for Stress Management

B Vitamins: These vitamins play a crucial role in energy production and brain health. Foods rich in B vitamins include whole grains, eggs, and legumes.

- **Vitamin D:** Often referred to as the "sunshine vitamin," vitamin D can help improve mood. Sources include fatty fish and fortified foods.
- **Antioxidants:** Foods high in antioxidants, such as berries and dark chocolate, can help combat oxidative stress and inflammation.

Creating a Balanced Plate

Aim to fill your plate with a variety of food groups:

- **Proteins:** Include lean meats, beans, and legumes.
- **Whole Grains:** Opt for brown rice, quinoa, and whole-grain bread.
- **Fruits and Vegetables:** Aim for a colorful variety to maximize nutrient intake.

Exercise Regularly

Physical activity is a powerful stress reliever.

- **Benefits:** Exercise releases endorphins, which can improve mood and reduce feelings of stress.
- **Recommendations:** Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise each week.

Practice Relaxation Techniques

Incorporating relaxation practices into your daily routine can help you manage stress more effectively.

- **Meditation:** Even a few minutes of meditation each day can promote a sense of calm.
- **Deep Breathing:** Practicing deep breathing exercises can help reduce anxiety and promote relaxation.

Prioritize Sleep

Quality sleep is essential for mental health and stress management.

- **Sleep Hygiene:** Establish a regular sleep schedule and create a calming bedtime routine.
- **Limit Screen Time:** Reduce exposure to screens before bed to improve sleep quality.

Seeking Professional Help

While dietary changes and lifestyle adjustments can significantly impact stress levels, it's essential to recognize when professional help is needed.

When to Seek Help

- **Persistent Anxiety:** If feelings of anxiety or stress persist, consider reaching out to a mental health professional.
- **Support Systems:** Talking to friends or family can also provide valuable support during challenging times.

Resources for Support

- **Therapists:** A licensed therapist can help you develop coping strategies and address underlying issues.
- **Support Groups:** Connecting with others who share similar experiences can provide comfort and understanding.

Managing stress requires dietary choices, lifestyle changes, and support. Include stress-relieving foods and emphasize mindful eating, hydration, and lifestyle adjustments to enhance resilience and foster a healthier mindset.



ROASTED BUTTERNUT SQUASH

INGREDIENTS

- 2 large butternut squash, halved lengthwise, seeds scooped out and discarded (about 2 1/2 lbs)
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- fresh ground pepper, to taste

Spice It Up

- **Sweet Spices:** Add a sprinkle of cinnamon or nutmeg for a warm, sweet flavor.
- **Savory Options:** Incorporate garlic powder, paprika, or cumin for a savory twist.
- **Herbs:** Fresh herbs like rosemary or thyme can add a fragrant touch.

Glazes and Sauces

- **Maple Syrup:** Drizzle with maple syrup before roasting for a sweet glaze.
- **Balsamic Reduction:** A balsamic glaze can add a tangy depth to the sweetness of the squash.

Butternut squash is a classic winter vegetable that not only adds a touch of sweetness to your dishes but also packs a nutritional punch. Roasting this versatile squash enhances its natural flavors, making it a favorite in many kitchens.

UNDERSTANDING BUTTERNUT SQUASH

Butternut squash is a type of winter squash that belongs to the gourd family. It has a smooth, tan exterior and a sweet, orange flesh. This vegetable is not only delicious but also rich in vitamins A and C, fiber, and antioxidants.

NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS

Including roasted butternut squash in your diet can offer numerous health benefits:

- **Rich in Nutrients:** It's an excellent source of vitamins A and C, which are essential for immune function and skin health.
- **High in Fiber:** Aids in digestion and helps maintain a healthy weight.
- **Low in Calories:** Makes it a great option for those looking to manage their weight without sacrificing flavor.

Nutrition Information

Serving: 3/4 cup (generous), Calories: 78.5 kcal, Carbohydrates: 16.5 g, Protein: 1.5 g, Fat: 2 g, Saturated Fat: 0.5 g, Sodium: 75.5 mg, Fiber: 3 g, Sugar: 3 g



INSTRUCTIONS



HOW TO MAKE IT

1. Preheat the oven to 425F. Spray a large sheet pan with oil.
2. Rub the flesh of the squash halves with olive oil and season with salt and black pepper. Lay the squash halves, cut side down on a rimmed sheet pan. Roast until you can pierce the flesh easily with a fork, about 40 to 45 minutes.
3. Scoop it out and serve.
4. This can be cubed and seasoned with more salt and served with a little butter and maple syrup, mashed in place of mashed potatoes, pureed, added to salads, or turned into butternut squash soup or a butternut squash sauce for pasta.

SERVING SUGGESTIONS

Roasted butternut squash is incredibly versatile and can be enjoyed in various ways.

As a Side Dish

Simple Side: Serve the roasted halves with a pat of butter and a drizzle of maple syrup.

Pair with Proteins: It complements roasted chicken, pork, or fish beautifully.

In Salads and Bowls

Grain Bowls: Toss cubed roasted squash into a grain bowl with quinoa, spinach, and nuts.

Salads: Add to kale or mixed green salads with apples, cranberries, and feta cheese.

Soups and Sauces

Butternut Squash Soup: Blend the roasted squash with vegetable broth, onion, and spices for a comforting soup.

Pasta Sauce: Puree the squash and mix it with cream or broth for a creamy pasta sauce.

Storage and Reheating

Proper storage can help you enjoy your roasted butternut squash throughout the week.

<https://www.self.com/gallery/bodyweight-exercises-you-can-do-at-home>

Featured Exercise ▶ Donkey Whips



HOW TO DO IT:

- Start on all fours.
- Pull your right knee toward your chest, keeping your foot flexed.
- Then, kick your right leg up behind you and toward the sky, then back down, keeping your knee bent and foot flexed.
- Repeat on the other side.

THE BENEFITS:

Donkey whips are a dynamic strength training exercise that primarily targets the glutes and hip abductors. This exercise not only enhances muscle strength but also improves flexibility in the hips and lower back, making it an excellent addition to any fitness regimen. The movements involved in donkey whips can help in sculpting the lower body while promoting balance and coordination.



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Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.



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