

Holistic NUTRITION

My Question...

I'm 33 and have always been fairly healthy. Lately, however, I can only sleep around 5 hours a night and I'm finding it hard to get out of bed in the morning. Consequently, I need tea and biscuits, or chocolate, throughout the day to keep me going. I also have PMT before my periods. On top of this, I've also gained a lot of weight in the last year especially around the middle. While I love my work in a PR company, I do feel under a lot of pressure from my boss and colleagues. At night I usually need a large glass of wine to calm myself down. Are there any foods that can help me to deal with my stress and energy levels?

ELIZABETH:

Everything you've described here tells me that you are currently on stress overload. I completely empathise with you because it seems that stress has now become synonymous with 21st-century living. Unfortunately, the food and drink choices that you are making to get yourself through the day are only offering a short-term 'fix' to what is a multifactorial problem. They also create a classic catch-22 situation. This is because when sugary foods are consumed there is a spike/dip energy effect – which leads to even more sugar cravings. The sad truth of the matter is that these choices will eventually lead to some form of burnout.

Virtually everyone has heard of the fight or flight mechanism which the human race developed in response to the threat of being attacked. Unfortunately, the modern 'sabre-toothed tigers' manifest in myriad ways (work stress, relationship issues, electromagnetic fields from mobile phones and computers, financial stress, etc.), and these stresses are often constant. When chronic stress is left unchecked it can lead to a cascade of negative effects on the body.

Here are the 4 major types of stress:

- 1) **Physical:** poor nutrition, lack of sleep, intense physical exertion
- 2) **Mental:** worry, anxiety, perfectionism
- 3) **Emotional:** fear, guilt, anger, shame
- 4) **Psychospiritual:** lack of spiritual alignment, difficult relationships, life challenges

When your body is stressed, the adrenals (the glands on top of the kidneys) release certain



stress hormones. Cortisol and adrenaline are the two commonly known major players. Unfortunately, the long-term ongoing release of these hormones can lead to multiple health issues – like the ones you are now experiencing. In time, this may lead to what is known as adrenal exhaustion.

So what can be done about this? Luckily, there are many things that you can do to lower stress levels and regain much greater health and vitality. A holistic approach is always best to ensure that the many different forms of stress are constantly kept in check.

NUTRITIONAL TIPS: NOURISH YOUR ADRENALS WITH PROTEIN

Eating protein-rich meals and snacks at regular intervals is key when it comes to balancing blood sugar levels – which helps take stress off the delicate adrenal glands. Quality protein sources include: beans (especially lentils, black beans and kidney beans for adrenal health), soaked nuts, seeds, raw nut/seed butter, fermented hemp or rice protein powder (great for smoothies), algae in the form of chlorella or spirulina, goats cheese or yogurt.

INCLUDE ESSENTIAL OMEGA-3 FATS

Adequate intake of omega-3 fats are very important for stress reduction. Research has shown that EPA and DHA (key components of omega 3-fats) play an important role in helping to support adrenal health and brain behaviour. Rich food sources include: mackerel, sardines, sprouted chia and flax seeds. Supplements include: fish oil, krill oil and vegan-based algae oil.

HYDRATE!

In order to support the adrenal glands, the body must be kept well hydrated throughout the day. It's important to drink between 6 and 8 glasses of pure filtered water daily. Decrease,

or eliminate, all caffeinated and alcoholic drinks (big adrenal stressors), and reach for green-vegetable-only juices (fruit juices spike blood sugar levels) and calming herbal teas instead.

CONSUME FERMENTED FOODS

The gut/mind connection is of great importance when it comes to keeping stress at bay. Research has revealed that healthy bowel flora, or the microbiome, can greatly assist in reducing anxiety, and is the heart of the human immune system response. Therefore, regular consumption of fermented foods is paramount in order to introduce probiotics (meaning pro-life) to the gut on a regular basis. Popular fermented foods include: raw unpasteurised sauerkraut, dill pickles, coconut and goats yogurt, miso soup and kombucha drinks.

KEY SUPPLEMENTATION

A full spectrum B-complex supplement is important for adrenal and nervous system support – especially during times of stress. It's important to use a quality (non-synthetic) wholefood state form for enhanced bioavailability. Magnesium, as the citrate or in body oil form (best taken at night), is a critical anti-stress mineral and is prized for its relaxing properties. Daily regular intake of vitamin C supplementation in food state form is also essential for rejuvenating adrenal health.

Additionally, adaptogenic herbs are powerfully effective for stress reduction, such as rhodiola and ashwagandha (best used on a rotational basis to give the system a rest).

LIFESTYLE TIPS: EXERCISE

Exercise plays an important role in stress reduction. Studies have shown that exercising as little as 3 or 4 times a week can make a big difference to how you handle daily challenges. The goal here is to not place too much stress



on the body by over exercising. Suitable forms of exercise include: yoga, brisk walking in nature, t'ai chi and dance. It's important to remember to eat within 30 minutes of exercise to balance the blood sugar and restore energy levels.

MEDITATE

A good way to take stress off the mind/body/spirit complex is to find the time to meditate on a daily basis. The body and breath are closely interconnected, and when we meditate on gentle rhythmic breathing for as little as 10 minutes a day, it can have profound effects on stress management.

POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

The endocrine system is inextricably connected to the chakra energy system. The base chakra, located at the base of the spine and perceived as red, externalises as the adrenal gland region and is associated with 'fight or flight'. One way of handling mental and emotional stressors is to repeat a positive affirmation several times throughout the day, which correlates to the base chakra. For example: 'I trust the process of life and I am safe' or 'All is well in my life, I am safe'.

Elizabeth is a UK-based holistic nutritionist, speaker, and health writer. She has studied nutrition and Eastern medicine for the last 30 years. She walks a shamanic path, and trained extensively in the Medicine Way healing practices of the indigenous people of the Americas with the renowned Four Winds Society.



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