

FOODS TO EAT TO BEAT STRESS

Almonds, Pistachios & Walnuts

When all hell breaks loose, reach for a handful of almonds. They're full of vitamin E, an antioxidant that bolsters the immune system. Almonds also contain B vitamins, which can help your body hold up during seriously unpleasant events. About a handful a day is all you need.

Sick of almonds? Shell pistachios or crack walnuts. Both will help keep your heart from racing when things heat up. "We experience immediate cardiovascular responses to stress because of the 'fight or flight' response," says Sheila G. West, M.D., associate professor of biobehavioral health at Penn State. When stress strikes, the hormone adrenaline raises blood pressure to boost energy -- so you're prepared to run like hell if you need to. But because we seldom need to fight or flee, it's better to blunt the strain on your heart. A 2007 Penn State study led by Dr. West found that eating one and a half ounces (about a handful) of pistachios a day lowers blood pressure so your heart doesn't have to work overtime. Walnuts have also been found to lower blood pressure, both at rest and under stress, West says. Add about a handful to salads, cereal, or oatmeal.

Avocados

The next time stress has you hankering for a high-fat, creamy treat, skip the ice cream and try some homemade guacamole -- the thick, rich texture can satisfy your craving and reduce those frantic feelings. Plus, the green wonders' double whammy of monounsaturated fat and potassium can lower blood pressure. One of the best ways to reduce high blood pressure, according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, is to get enough potassium -- and just half an avocado offers 487 milligrams, more than you'll get from a medium-size banana. To whip up your own avocado salad dressing, puree a medium avocado with 2 tablespoons of lemon juice and a dash of cayenne.

Skim Milk

Science backs up the old warm-milk remedy for insomnia and restlessness. Turns out calcium can reduce muscle spasms and soothe tension, says Mary Dallman, Ph.D., professor of physiology at the University of California, San Francisco. A glass of moo juice (preferably skim or 1 percent) may also reduce stressful PMS symptoms such as mood swings, anxiety, and irritability. According to a 2005 study from the Archives of Internal Medicine, women who drank four or more servings of low-fat or skim milk per day had a 46 percent lower risk of pre-period misery than women who had no more than one serving per week.

Oatmeal

Carbohydrates make the brain produce more serotonin, the same relaxing brain chemical released when you eat dark chocolate. The more slowly your body absorbs carbs, the more steadily serotonin flows, according to Judith Wurtman, Ph.D., a former MIT research scientist and co-author of *The Serotonin Power Diet*. The result: a less-likely-to-snap you. Because thick, hearty oatmeal is high in fiber, few things take longer for your stomach to digest, says Elizabeth Somer, M.A., R.D., author of *Food & Mood*. Wurtman also recommends topping it with a swirl of jam for a quicker release of serotonin. When you know it's going to be a doozy of a day, avoid heavily processed varieties (e.g., the sugary kind that come in packets meant for the microwave), which are digested more quickly, and take the time to make thick-cut old-fashioned oats. But if two minutes for breakfast is all you have, you can still do your mood a favor by opting for instant oatmeal over Cocoa Puffs.

Oranges

Fretting over a job interview or presentation at work? Pour yourself a glass of orange juice or peel yourself an orange. The magic nutrient here is vitamin C. In a study in Psychopharmacology, German researchers subjected 120 people to a public-speaking task plus a series of math problems. Those who took 3,000 milligrams of vitamin C reported that they felt less stressed, and their blood pressure and

levels of cortisol (a stress hormone) returned to normal faster. "Vitamin C is also a well-known immune system booster," says Amy Jamieson-Petonic, R.D., a spokesperson for the *American Dietetic Association*.

Salmon

Stress hormones have an archenemy: omega-3 fatty acids. A 2003 study from *Diabetes & Metabolism* found that a diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids kept cortisol and adrenaline from geysering. Omega-3 fatty acids also protect against heart disease, according to a 2002 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. "Eat a 85gram serving of fish, especially fatty fish like salmon, mackerel, herring, and light tuna, at least twice a week," Jamieson-Petonic says. Not a fish eater? For another omega-3 punch, buy foods fortified with DHA (you'll find this particular fatty acid in eggs, yogurt, milk, and soy products); but don't go out of your way for products that boast booming levels of ALA, another fatty acid, which may not work as well.

Spinach

Magnesium was made to calm holiday insanity. First, the mineral can help lower your stress levels, keeping your body in a state of relative ease as you kick off yet another round of small talk at the company party. Not getting enough magnesium may trigger migraine headaches and make you feel fatigued. (And almost seven out of 10 of us don't get enough of the stuff. No wonder we're cranky.) Just one cup of spinach provides 40 percent of your daily value -- so try subbing it for lettuce on sandwiches and salads. (And now you have an excuse to indulge in the spinach

Source: www.womenshealthmag.com