

We all get stressed and feel a little blue from time to time and eating a healthy diet is one of the very best ways to keep your moods and stress levels balanced.

Food has a powerful effect on the brain and on the way we feel.

Here are a few tips for implementing and maintaining a balanced diet.

With a new dietary style and when new eating habits are established, you will feel healthier, clearer and more relaxed in every way, enjoying increased energy, improved digestion and great sleep.

- **WATER** – We often mistake thirst for hunger – when we are stressed we are dehydrated and when we are dehydrated we are stressed, resulting in a vicious circle. Dehydration causes stress and fatigue, both of which can lead to depression. As we are made of 75% water, all our cells need water for every single function carried out. This is particularly true for the brain, so make water your top priority and drink at least 5 pints a day; you will be amazed at how much more energy you have.
- **GOOD CARBS** – Carbohydrates are important for energy production; in fact they are the body's No 1 choice of fuel, providing healthy steady energy. The key to health is selecting the good carbs, which can help prevent diabetes and heart disease and also help fight fatigue, mood swings, stress and obesity. Among the good Carbohydrates are slowly digested fruit and vegetables, (the greener the vegetable the more nutritious they will be). Incorporate certain slow release grains like short grain brown rice, millet, oats and rye. Try some wholesome vegetable soups or raw vegetable juices; add short grain brown rice or sweet potato to main meals as an alternative to pasta & potato.
- **FAT** - Although it is sometimes given a bad reputation, fat is essential in the 'good moods' category; too little fat in the diet will leave you feeling unhappy, whereas foods with a high fat content release endorphins and make you feel happy. Always stick to healthy fats, such as monounsaturated, that are found in some nuts, olives and fish oils. Also make sure you include plenty of the essential omega 3 fats which are found in sea food, particularly oily fish. Alternatively, take some Flax seed oil; these wonderful oils are a great stress and depression eliminator and will keep the brain healthy. On all accounts avoid all Trans and hydrogenated fats and oils.
- **GREEN TEA** – If you are a Coffee, Coke or tea addict, you probably are unaware of the effect that all of this caffeine is having on your system. However just by reducing the amount of these drinks you will significantly improve stress levels and also improve your mental performance throughout the day. Too much caffeine in the system can interfere with sleep at night, so make it a rule never to drink Coffee after 2pm. Green tea is soothing has, a pleasant taste and is loaded with important antioxidants.
- **REDUCE ANIMAL FOODS** – High-protein foods elevate levels of dopamine and norepinephrine, both of which are associated with higher levels of anxiety and stress. You should have 2-3 animal-free days each week, make vegetable curry and have hummus on sweet potato with large salads. Add beans, and legumes instead of meat in stir fries or casseroles.

- **HEALTHY SNACKS** – Always carry some healthy protein-rich snacks with you. Keep them in your car or your briefcase; these will help with energy dips and mood swings as they will help keep your blood sugar levels constant. Try things like hummus and cucumber on some oat cakes, or plenty of seeds and nuts, or why not try a hard boiled egg? All of these are healthy snacks and will contribute toward better moods.
- **MAKE YOUR OWN** – It is during times of stress when we eat on the go. Often, fast food places and take-way restaurants become a habit at lunchtime, so make it a rule that at least 2-3 times a week you make your own lunch the night before, it is really quick and easy to put a load of mixed salad into a Tupperware bowl add loads of sweet corn, rice and butter beans and a little French dressing or olive oil. Alternatively replace beans with a tin of tuna or salmon, or fill wholemeal pitta bread with hummus and loads of mixed salad and rocket leaves – add an apple and some healthy seeds for when you get the munchies and you have a much healthier lunch.
- **SPRING CLEAN THE KITCHEN CUPBOARDS** Throw away any of the processed foods, which are loaded with salt, sugar and bad fats. It is easier to give in to these foods at home, so by binning them and replacing with much healthier foods you will then be forced to snack on good nutritious foods and snacks that your body can use in a more healthy way.
- **FORWARD PLANNING** – Stock those shelves with healthier alternatives. Find a few minutes over the weekend and plan your menus for the week ahead; list the ingredients and write a shopping list so you will know that all meals are taken care of and you won't have the stress of deciding what to eat each day.
- **EXERCISE** – Adding some kind of exercise to the weekly schedule is a great way of boosting those happy endorphins and relaxing the mind as well as keeping you in great shape. Good exercise will also keep your mind off all that unhealthy food. Find some exercise that suits you; it may be a really sweaty aerobic-type workout, jogging or cycling to release yourself of all that tension or maybe something calmer like yoga or tai-chi. Have a look and see what is on offer near you.
- **MEDITATION** – The first step in meditation is to concentrate and focus the mind, giving you time to visualise your new healthy lifestyle. There are many good visualisation techniques and you can start with a good CD or book, like Dr Wayne W Dyer “Getting into the Gap”.

If you can change your food habits you WILL be able to fight stress very easily. However, many of us believe that we can get rid of stress without changing our poor diets and bad habits. If you avoid undesirable food you will not only help in reducing your stress levels but you will also be contributing to a longer and healthier life.

Stay healthy!

Diana.