

## APPENDIX A

### Reading Text 1

#### Good nutrition can ease stress



Feeling wound-up, overworked and exhausted? Do you feel a lack of focus or have trouble sleeping at night? Busy schedules can leave us stressed out, irritable and run down. When our lives get busy it is easy to overlook the importance of eating a balanced diet. Yet, good nutrition can make the difference between feeling great and energized, or cranky and tired.

#### Fight or flight stress response

When we feel threatened or under attack, brain chemicals and adrenal hormones that enable us to think quickly or to run away from a threat are released into the bloodstream. This is our primitive "fight or flight" response, which in the past helped us escape dangerous situations. These days, when we experience ongoing stress, these "fight or flight" chemicals are released continuously and can begin to interfere with the body's ability to stay in balance.

#### Brain chemicals

Certain brain chemicals called neurotransmitters, such as serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine, dictate how we experience emotion and how we feel. Neurotransmitters generate feelings of happiness, mental alertness and calmness. Deficiencies of the chemicals can lead to depression, irritability, anxiety, sleeplessness and food cravings. Neurotransmitters are derived in part from the foods we eat. So, a few simple dietary changes may help to increase their levels naturally and improve the body's response to stress, countering its effects on our health and moods.

#### Eating behavior and stress

Eating is a common response to stress. When we are under stress, we are more likely to skip meals or grab for our favorite high-calorie comfort foods. Eating favorite foods in moderation to help alleviate stress is probably fine. However, poor eating habits brought on by stress could lead to unwanted weight gain and poor health in the long term.

### **Dietary stress-fighters**

Choosing balanced meals containing nutrient-dense complex carbohydrates, protein and fat that will slowly fuel our brain chemicals throughout the day is the ideal way to keep our bodies in balance during stressful periods.

### **Complex carbohydrates**

These increase the amount of serotonin in your brain, a powerful neurotransmitter that boosts your mood, calms you down and helps you sleep. *Food sources: fruits, vegetables, whole grains and starchy foods.*

Simple sugars (found in candy, syrups, table sugar, alcohol and sweetened fruits), however, cause a brief spike in blood sugar which may make you feel better in the short term but can be followed by a quick drop in energy and leave you craving more.

### **Protein-rich foods**

Eating them slows down the rate at which sugar is released into your bloodstream and keeps your blood sugar balanced. It also keeps you feeling full longer, making you less likely to grab for a high-calorie sweet snack. *Food sources: dairy foods (cheese, milk, yogurt), fish, meats, legumes (beans and lentils), peanut butter, poultry and tofu*

### **Essential Fats**

These fats (a.k.a. omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids) can only be obtained through our diet. They promote the flow of nutrients into cells and allow waste products to escape from the cells. Research shows that seafood such as salmon and other oily fish contain omega-3 fatty acids, which appear to help relieve mild depression. *Food sources: nuts (almonds, walnuts), oils (canola, flax, soybean), oily fish (salmon, sardines, tuna), and seeds (flax, pumpkin).*

### **More dietary suggestions:**

Eat small meals and snacks that include protein-rich foods to maintain a stable blood sugar. Don't eliminate any one food group. Avoid extremely low fat diets - some fat is needed for anti-depression. Have breakfast - skipping this important meal can lead to impulse snacking on sweets.

**Exercise Improves Your Health**

Physical activity has countless benefits, improving both physical and mental health. Try to get at least 30 minutes or more of moderate physical activity most days of the week. If sleeplessness is a problem for you, it's best to exercise in the morning or during the day, rather than at night. Too much physical activity close to bedtime can rev up your metabolism and make it harder to fall asleep.

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