

Fighting stress with food

Some of us turn away from food completely in times of stress, others tend to eat whatever they have in sight. Try these tips from Appetite Right nutritionist **Nicholas Arthur**.

Why does stress cause overeating?

Stress can seriously damage your health. In nature, stress is a necessary survival reaction, but the stresses of modern day life have nothing to do with real danger. In modern life the hormones nature intended to help us deal with stress often remain constantly in the blood stream, causing chronic stress. This can lead to symptoms such as weight gain, low libido, difficulty in concentrating and poor memory, as well as more serious problems, including heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, and skin conditions.

Stress often affects the way we eat: we skip meals, or turn to 'comfort foods.' But the highly processed carbohydrates, high-fat foods we generally choose for 'comfort' send blood sugar soaring, and then plummeting. Unfortunately, the body interprets rapidly falling blood sugar levels (which also occur when meals are skipped) as a stressful situation, and the body responds by secreting even more stress hormones.

Some people crave sweets, bread, potatoes, or other types of high-processed, high-carbohydrate foods. When they eat something sweet, or a savoury snack like potato chips or cracker biscuits, they find they often end up eating the whole pack.

After lunch stressed people often feel tired, even lethargic,

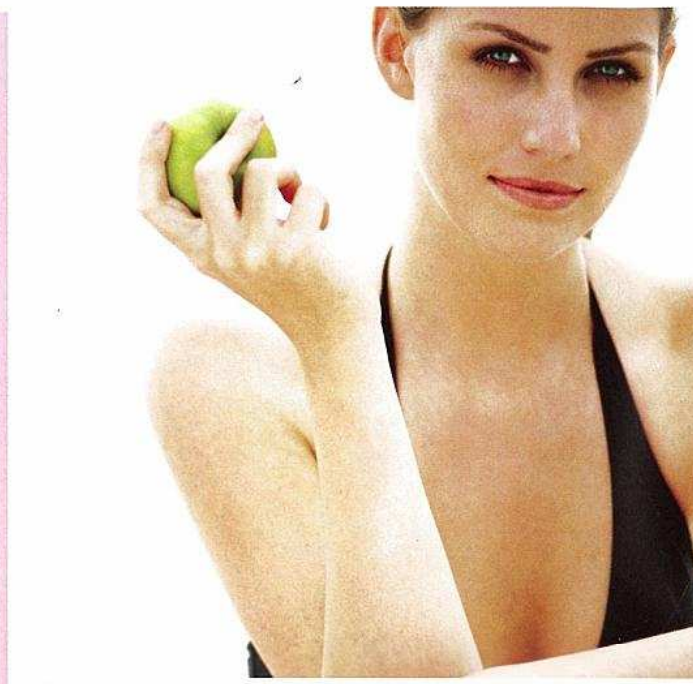
concentration may be poor and irritability can set in. At this point it's very common to reach for foods to help you feel better quickly, these foods are often high in either carbohydrate or fat, or both, like chocolate, or a sweet drink.

These high-energy foods give you the more immediate energy you crave, but then an hour or two later you feel tired and hungry again. This pattern is repeated after dinner, which is often a big meal and eaten quite late.

A sugar and fat addiction can happen to anyone who is stressed or depressed. You are likely to turn to food such as chocolate or other sweet and fatty or starchy foods because, by increasing the levels of serotonin and endorphins in the brain, they provide a soothing calming effect. But these foods also cause high insulin levels, which can lead to obesity, type II diabetes, high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease. Understanding the effects that different foods have on the body can control hormones and the way they work in the body, and thereby improving wellbeing and health.

Can certain foods alleviate/reduce stress?

Vitamins such as B complex, C and E along with minerals like manganese, selenium and zinc are helpful in relieving stress. Fresh vegetables and fruits



provide vitamins and minerals. Green, yellow and orange vegetables like tomatoes and carrots are rich in vitamins for stress and minerals.

Vegetables also contain more fibre content which is helpful in treating constipation and the loose stools associated with Irritable bowel syndrome which is one of the long term effects of stress. Yoghurt provides minerals including calcium essential for proper nerve impulses and lacto bacillus which is essential for maintaining gut flora.

Sprouted beans like mung beans, and alfalfa can provide all nutrients in a balanced and easily digestible and absorbable way. One should remember that stress affects digestion.

Fishes like salmon, mackerel and tuna contain omega

fatty acids which protect the heart, from heart diseases which are precipitated by stress. Moreover fish also contains more of choline which is a memory booster.

A stress-fighting diet plan

A low glycaemic diet is most commonly recommended, further to this, water should be consumed in high quantities. Eat little and eat often (at least six times in a day, depending on how little you eat). This may help increase the metabolic rate. Saturated fats and salt should be avoided. Salt can raise the blood pressure, thereby leading to heart problems. Processed and packaged foods contain high quantities of salt. Above all, it's important to find a happy balance.*