Nutrition: A Recipe for Stress Success

WHAT DOES NUTRITION HAVE TO DO WITH STRESS?

The relationship between what we eat and how we feel is something most of us understand and accept. It's also something most of us tend to forget - especially in times of stress. Brushing up on nutrition knowledge and replacing bad habits with good ones can make a big difference in our energy level, our resistance to illness and our ability to handle stress.

Common Barriers to Eating Well

Despite growing consumer interest in nutrition, it can be overlooked when day-to-day activities take precedence. Lack of time, knowledge, support and energy contribute to poor diets. You may be struggling with some of these common barriers to good nutrition:

- your busy schedule interferes with your attempts at healthy eating
- you skip meals only to overeat later
- you want to eat well but can't seem to muster up enough energy to do so
- when you really feel like something healthy there's nothing in the refrigerator
- you turn to food when feeling stressed, bored or tired
- you fluctuate between periods of sensible, nutritious eating and unhealthy eating
- you don't feel confident in choosing a healthy diet
- you lack the time to research nutrition yourself

Eating Well Helps You Get the Most Out of Life

Fuelling your body with healthy food is well worth the investment. Which of these rewards are important to you?

- increased energy level
- successful weight management
- increased mental energy
- improved physical performance
- stronger immune system
- increased ability to handle stress
- decreased risk of heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis, high blood pressure and diabetes

Six Basic Principles of a Healthy Diet

1. **Breakfast**
   Breakfast gets your body and mind revved up and ready to go. Breakfast eaters tend to be more successful at weight management, have less food cravings, eat less at night and have higher intakes of certain vitamins and minerals. An easy way to make a big difference is to take 10 minutes to start your day with a bowl of cereal and fruit, a peanut butter sandwich and a glass of milk, or a bagel with low fat cheese and a glass of juice.

2. **Regular eating**
   Skipping meals during the day is setting yourself up to overeat at night. Fuelling yourself regularly, every 4-6 hours, helps to keep your energy level high and prevents overeating later in the day. For most people, this means eating three meals per day and possibly one or two nutritious snacks.

3. **Low fat, high carbohydrate selections**
   Some fat is essential for good health but overdoing it can increase your risk for weight gain, heart disease and certain cancers. High fat diets can also make you feel tired and sluggish. Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating recommends reaching for plenty of whole grain cereals, breads and other grain products, fruits and vegetables, choosing lower fat milk products more often and leaner meats,

poultry and fish. Include some low fat protein selections like chickpeas, kidney beans and lentils. Invest in a low fat cookbook for tasty and interesting meals.

4. **Hydration**
   Water is involved in almost every process in your body so it makes sense that if you're not getting enough, your body will not function at its potential. Fatigue is one of the most common symptoms of dehydration. So just by drinking enough water, you can boost your energy level. Aim for 6-8 cups a day of water or other hydrating fluids like juice and milk.

5. **Five a day!**
   That's the magic number of servings of fruits and vegetables it is recommended you eat daily. If you eat more than this - even better. Fruits and vegetables help to stave off heart disease, cancer and have also been linked to helping control high blood pressure. Load up that shopping cart with fresh produce and have canned and frozen fruits and vegetables on hand for easy access. Grab a piece of fruit to take to work or keep a stock of it at the office for a quick snack during the day.

6. **Variety**
   If your diet lacks variety it may also lack certain nutrients. By eating different foods you gain the special benefits that each food has to offer. Enjoy foods with different tastes, textures and colours. Variety is the spice of life, so enjoy!

The stress that poor nutrition adds to our lives is well documented, as are the health risks of obesity. The bounty of food we have to choose from makes us lucky among the world's people. Choosing what and how we eat is a personal decision, and when we choose with knowledge and awareness, we boost our level of health and well-being on all levels.