

Avoiding Stress Eating in a Stressful Time

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The last month has proven stressful for Americans. Making healthy food choices and staying active can assist in stress reduction. Just as managing stress is important every day it is especially important during uncertain times. Mindful decisions about eating habits can support long term wellness. Continuing healthy behaviors or stopping an unhealthy one can prove beneficial for easing stress.

When taking a trip to the grocery store, making better food choices to improve overall health is essential for reducing stress. Avoid high fat, high sodium and high sugar foods and try to stock up on food that provides health benefits. While grocery stores may not have all items in stock, seek smart alternatives with health in mind. If there is not a fresh fruit or vegetable available due to limited quantities try something new or purchase frozen or canned products. Make sure frozen or canned purchases are low in sodium and sugar, avoid heavy syrup and salty products to get better benefits.

Stress eating is a response to the body's desire to reproduce happy thoughts or comforts. The human brain relays a message to signal pleasure when something feels nice. The brain then starts to associate pleasure activities like a piece of cake with happiness. Usually cake is eaten when being enjoyed with family and friends celebrating a special occasion. The brain then associates the high fat high sugar food with happiness creating a craving for that food even when it's not a special occasion to replicate that feeling of happiness. According to the Journal of Miverva Endocrinologica high fat and high sugar foods are known as hyperpalatable meaning they may possess addictive qualities. In stressful times seeking comfort from food isn't uncommon but understanding it can make it easier to manage. Continually consuming a high fat high sugar diet is linked to obesity and chronic disease. Replacing cravings with whole foods during stressful times will create a healthy balance and ultimately assist with combatting stress.

Vegetables and Fruits get color from phytochemicals and while that may sound like something unnatural it is the component that provides color and nutrients to produce. While high fat, sodium and sugar foods support stress eating fruits and vegetables provide fiber, a sense of fullness and nutrients to support health. Variety is important when choosing foods so that nutrients are varied and plentiful. The color groups of vegetables and fruits are white, red, green, yellow/orange and blue/purple. Each color group assists in the prevention of cancer but some groups like green, white, yellow and orange are especially important for supporting the immune system. White produce lowers both blood pressure and bad cholesterol. Red fruits and veggies have antioxidants, improve brain function and fight heart disease. Green produce is associated with eye health and prevents macular degeneration. Green phytochemicals include folic acid and therefore aid in the prevention of birth defects in pregnant women and prevent heart disease. Orange and yellow fruits and veggies promote bone, skin and eye health. Blue and Purple produce prevent heart disease and stroke and support good memory, healthy aging and urinary tract health. An apple a day may keep the doctor away, but more fruits and veggies everyday can help keep the stress away too.

Roasted Red Pepper Hummus

Ingredients

- 2 red peppers
- 2 can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 2-3 cloves garlic, peeled
- 2-4 Tablespoons olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper

Preparation Steps

1. Rinse red peppers under cool running water. Pat dry then remove stem end and seeds. Cut the peppers in half, then in half again.
2. Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil. Place the pepper section, flesh side down (skin side up) on the foil. Gently press the pepper sections down to flatten slightly.
3. Broil on the top rack of an oven or broiler. Broil until the skins are blistered and charred. Remove the pan from the oven then cover the peppers with foil. Allow to stand 10 minutes or until cool enough to handle.
4. Remove the pepper skins with a paper towel (this keeps the skins from sticking to your fingers).
5. Place chickpeas roasted red peppers, garlic, salt, pepper, and 2 Tablespoons olive oil in a food processor. Process until the mixture is smooth and creamy. If the mixture is dry, add 1 additional Tablespoon olive oil, then, process again.
6. Serve Roasted Red Pepper Hummus with a variety of your favorite veggies! The hummus is also delicious as a nutritious spread on your favorite sandwich, example: tomato, spinach, cheese and hummus on multigrain bread.