

# Women's Stress Management and Nutrition



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## Abstract

Stress is a common term used by people when they encounter a problem in their life. This problem could be anything from the work environment to the death of a family member. Stress, in biological terms refers to the after effects of a person failing to respond properly to an event that has occurred in their life, whether physical or emotional.

The following are some of the symptoms that you may encounter when you suffer from stress.

1. Muscle tension
2. Loss of focus/concentration
3. Headaches
4. Increased heart rate
5. Having a short temper
6. An edgy personality
7. Irritations
8. Loss of appetite

The life style of today is very stressful. We women are very-very sensitive beings. The impact that stress can have on our health is very serious and can cause problems to every major system in our body with the right nutrition, we can reduce the impact that stress has on our body and effectively repair any damage that has been done prior this. When stress occurs, incorporating a well balanced nutritional plan into our life style will help us pull through any challenging times that we may come across.

**Keywords:** Stress, Balanced Nutrition.

## Introduction

Stress is a common problem that we all have to deal with in our lives. Some more than others. There are many factors that bring stress upon the body, such as the job of the person and certain events that happen in their life.

Stress, in biological terms refers to the after effects of a person failing to respond properly to an event that has occurred in their life, whether physical or emotional.

Stress is of course totally natural and our bodies are designed to deal with it very effectively. However, if stress occurs in excess, it is detrimental. Stress causes changes in the body's chemistry, altering the balance of hormones in ways that can have an impact on our entire body. The glands that help us respond to stress are THE ADRENAL GLANDS, through the release of hormonal messengers:- Adrenaline and nonadrenaline, cortisol, DHEA and aldosterone.

Today we live in a world of 24 hour stimulation and "stress". Every day we are exposed to a number of physical and psychological stressors- a demanding job, the fear of losing our job, 24 hr. access to media and graphic information, relationship dynamics, lack of sleep, financial pressures, suboptimal nutrition, dieting, skipping meals, over- exercise, illness or infection whilst the adrenals can deal with the increased demands short term, there is a negative impact on other systems and glands when the body is exposed to excessive levels of cortisol and adrenaline.

1. Digestion and absorption of nutrients is impaired.
2. The immune system is weakened.
3. Blood sugar levels peak and trough –commonly weight gain occurs due to the huge energy pool generated.
4. Other aspects of the endocrine function-particularly reproductive and thyroid are impacted.

As the stress becomes chronic this puts an incredible strain on the adrenals themselves and ultimately leads to adrenal imbalance.

Women especially with adrenal imbalance often have a "spare tyre", or what we call abdominal fat when we have long-term stress, cortisol and insulin remain high in the blood, and the extra glucose that isn't needed for energy gets stored in the form of fat– primarily abdominal fat.

Often women see the the signs that tell them something is not quite right with their health, but it's difficult to know what the signs are pointing to.

Stress affects hormones, hormones affect brain chemistry and affects stress. When any one of these three aspects of female health gets out of balance, it starts a vicious cycle that will continue to get worse if left untreated and eventually cause dire consequences.

Here are some of the facts why stress management is essential for women's health and vitality.

We're doing too much. We're all doing too much we have our "To Do" list that we're all trying to finish and we feel like if we can get to the bottom of that list, everything is going to be fine. But by the next day, we have another list that's just as long that we need to do.

We're running around doing chores all day and we never take the time to stop and really listen to ourselves. "Who am I? What do I need? What is my body telling me?" "Symptoms mean that something is wrong. It's your body's way of telling you "Help! Fix me!" Women don't take the time to really check in and see what is going on. How are you really feeling? How could you feel better?

The lifestyle of today is very stressful-just being. We women are very, very sensitive beings. We're not designed to be out there running around being both male and female. Women are put into the same box with the other sex that is wired completely differently when it comes to handling stress.

As an example, we women like to talk because when we talk, we release something called Oxytocin in the brain. Oxytocin actually blocks the stress hormone, so we feel better. So that is the actual biochemical reason women want to talk.

#### **Stress and Nutritional Insufficiency**

One of the main issues with stress is that it can cause unhealthy eating habits. This applies mainly to people who are always on the go and lead a busy lifestyle. People that fall into this category have no time to fit a balanced nutrition around their busy schedule additionally, stress makes the body crave foods that are high in fats and sugars. And if you're turning to caffeine to ward off fatigue, that can backfire too, by disrupting your sleep. These high calorie comfort foods can stimulate the release of certain chemicals in the brain that make us feel good- at least in the short term- and also make us want to keep eating. But in a vicious cycle, overeating can lead to weight gain- which increases psychological stress and which, in turn, can lead to more overeating. Consuming foods that are of a 'Junk' nature actually increase the volume of stress on your body. The following are common examples of how people react with good when they become overwhelmed with stress.

1. Fast food intake
2. Forgetting/Skipping meals
3. Coffee intake.
4. Eating the wrong food types.
5. Food dieting.
6. Constantly picking at foods.

Thus if we employ bad practice in our nutrition management while under stress, we invite the risk of seriously damaging our body.

#### **Effects of Nutritional insufficiency on body under stress**

1. Negative hormonal side effects from caffeine intake.
2. Weight issues.
3. Poor health & immune system.
4. Imbalances in the blood sugar.

When under stress, the body uses more essential nutrients than it normally would. After these resources are drained, the body starts to degenerate. Therefore it is vitally important that these nutrients are constantly 'topped' up to ensure the body is well protected to cope with stress and other areas of illness. A well balanced, nutritional management program is one of the best ways to compact the effects of stress.

#### **Combating stress with Nutrition Management**

Stress is going to happen at some point in a person's life and will most defiantly happen more than the once. You can either let your body suffer from the effects of stress, or you can choose to do something about it when stress occurs, incorporating a well balanced nutritional plan into your lifestyle will help you pull through any challenging times that you may come across.

While we might not be able to make the stress go away, there are things we can do to help manage stress levels & the way in which we respond to it.

#### **5<sup>th</sup> healthy eating tips to reduce stress**

##### **1. Eat Balanced Meals**

Try to include some lean protein- like poultry, egg whites, low fat dairy or soy products- with each meal. Protein satisfies hunger & also helps keep you mentally alert. Round out your meal with fresh fruits, vegetable and whole grains.

##### **2. Eat Regularly and Don't Skip Meals**

If stress is an appetite-killer try eating smaller amounts of food more often during the day.

##### **3. Try to Avoid Using Food as A Stress Reducer**

A brisk walk or a cup of herbal tea might work instead, Try snacking on a handful of almonds, soy nuts or baby carrots.

##### **4. Cut back on Caffeine**

People often feel a lack of energy when they're stressed and turn to caffeine as a pick me up, but it can disrupt your night's sleep. If caffeine keeps you awake at night, drink decaffeinated coffees and teas.

##### **5. Try to Keep Meal Time Pleasant:** and separate from work or other sources of stress. Take a little extra time to slow down and relax while you eat- you're likely to eat less and enjoy it more.

#### **Foods to Include**

##### **High-fiber, Carbohydrate-Rich Foods**

Scientists believe carbohydrates cause the brain to produce more serotonin, a hormone that relaxes us, and lots of fiber is helpful in preventing late night bingeing. Some examples of healthy comfort food include baked sweet potatoes, sauteed vegetables over rice.

**Fruits and Vegetables**

Chronic stress can weaken our ability to fight disease. By upping our intake of antioxidant rich fruits and vegetables we can boost our immune system. Vitamin-C and beta carotene rich fruits and vegetables are stress- busting antioxidants such as carrots, papaya, oranges, lemons etc.

**Foods to Avoid**

**High Fat Foods**

Fatly foods such as meat or cheese dishes and many baked goods thicken our blood which in turn makes us feel tired, even lethargic. This is clearly not a good way to reduce stress!

**Caffeine**

Many of us deal with a stress- induced lack of sleep by turning to coffee, tea and colas. Although it can give a quick boost when required the fatigue will catch up once the caffeine has worn off. An over excess of caffeine can lead to negative effects such as restlessness, lapses of concentration and a decrease in your ability to be fully effective.

**Sugar**

As a carbohydrate, sugar tends to calm us. The problem with sugar is that it's a simple carbohydrate so it enters and leaves the blood stream rapidly, causing us to, in effect, "Crash". On the other hand, complex carbohydrates such as beans, lentils, the starch parts of foods soothe without bringing us down.

If a balanced nutrition is not present when stressed, the body will use up the spare resources that should not be touched.

This lack of resources effectively drains the body's defenses, making the person more prone to illness and greater levels of stress.

**Conclusion**

Hence a balanced nutrition plays an important role when we are under stress. When stress occurs, a well balanced nutrition will boost our resistance against the effects that stress brings upon the body. It is important to recognise that when under stress the nutrients that we have consumed will be drained at a much quicker rate than they are normally. Therefore it is important to constantly top up on vital nutrients.

Stress really is a silent killer as most people don't realize, or even think that stress can be harmful when actually, it is quite the opposite. It is very unwise to disregard stress on your body. If not treated properly further down the line you will encounter severe long term illnesses.

Although there is no quick fix for curing stress, it can be limited and will defend against with a balanced nutritional diet.

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