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News Release

## **Stress Eating**

Everyone is familiar with the term “stress eating” which simply means to eat everything in sight without having any control. It may sound like fun, but it can be very damaging in the long run. In times of a troubled economy, stress becomes a major factor in many people’s lives. News reports tell of the vast increase of people being treated for panic attacks due to stress. So, how can persons cope with the overload of worry? One of the best solutions is to pay particular attention to a healthy diet.

Good nutrition seems to be the key to combating most major health concerns and stress is no different from other chronic conditions. Symptoms of stress include nerviness and a racing heart beat. Therefore, most health providers suggest following a diet for heart health. The standard recommendations are to limit intake of salt, sugar and fat while increasing fiber. In addition, patients should avoid caffeine and alcohol because one acts as a stimulant and the other as a depressant.

It is easy to find information that claims eating a certain food is a cure-all for stress. But, that just isn’t so. A good balanced diet from all of the food groups makes more sense. Eating two servings of protein per day will help the body maintain and repair itself. Lean meats, eggs, beans and soy products provide ample protein. Some people lean toward eating turkey or fish for protein citing the release of endorphins (feel-good brain chemicals) as their reason for choosing these foods.

Dried fruits and fruits high in antioxidants, such as blueberries, are good dietary choices because they yield vitamins and minerals that help to keep blood pressure in check. Vegetables, especially dark green leafy vegetables, also deliver a good blend of vitamins and minerals. Potassium, calcium, iron, zinc, copper, magnesium, vitamin C, the B vitamins and folic acid all play a role in heart health. But, rather than focusing on one nutrient, focus on eating foods from all of the groups in the food guide pyramid and the necessary vitamins and minerals will automatically be included in the diet.

Carbohydrates are the primary nutrient that powers our brains. Whole grain breads and cereals along with brown rice and wild rice and starchy vegetables, such as sweet potatoes, can supply carbohydrates while boosting fiber. High fiber helps to slow the digestive process and ease digestive problems related to stress. All unrefined foods from a plant source furnish fiber.

Low fat milk and low fat yogurt are important to a stress diet because of the calcium and vitamins they contain. Calcium is not only needed for strong bones and teeth, but also for

maintaining muscle tone. Remember the heart is the strongest muscle in the body because it never stops its workout routine.

Surprisingly soup consumption is promoted as a good stress reliever. Not only is soup warm and comforting to eat, but it is loaded with vitamins and minerals. Soups are usually inexpensive and can be made from a variety of leftovers which is a plus for harsh economic times.

Last, but not least is the need for water in the stress diet. Of course, water is not a food but it does aid with the metabolism of foods and the processing of food waste.

During an economic crisis, the last thing a person needs to deal with is the expense of illness. That's why it is so important to prevent health problems through a good diet. For more information about healthy eating please contact Jennifer Dutton, Regional Extension Agent—Human Nutrition, Diet and Health at the St. Clair County Extension office at (205) 338-9416 or email [jld0021@aces.edu](mailto:jld0021@aces.edu).

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