

Day 9 Healthy Choices to Lower Stress

Studies show that healthy people deal better with stressors. The first cited study is found in the Old Testament when Daniel and his friends ate a vegetarian diet (Daniel 1:12-16) that proved healthier than the king's prescribed diet. In addition, our bodies produce chemicals that can increase or reduce stress.

Stress and Cortisol

Our brain produces cortisol in reaction to stress. That can be helpful short term as it increases alertness and motivation to respond. However, long term elevation of cortisol has many negative consequences and can cause mental illness. Cortisol can increase concentration problems, anxiety, depression, dementia, mood swings, and even schizophrenia. It also puts people at risk for diabetes, obesity, irritability, headaches, hypertension, immune disorders, and other health issues.

4 Good Hormones that Trigger Happiness

Many people know that exercise produces endorphins that make us feel happy, but other hormones our body can produce also help us feel better.

- Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that sends messages to the brain. It can increase feelings of pleasure and reward, and help a person learn, focus, strive, and find interest in things. That helps you move forward on tough projects. It also helps kidney function, heart rate, and blood vessel functioning. Too much can cause hallucinations and delusions or faster and irregular heart rate and other problems. Some ways to increase dopamine by eating protein and probiotics, and getting enough sleep and sunlight.
- Oxytocin (also called the love or cuddle hormone) creates a positive feedback loop by increases our comfort in socializing and then when we socialize that increases oxytocin. Oxytocin also increases with touch, including petting animals, pleasant aromas, and soothing music. What really triggers oxytocin is social trust, so spend time with friends you trust. Doing acts of kindness also promotes oxytocin.
- Serotonin helps us balance our moods, regulate anxiety, reduce depression, and helps with digestion, sleep, and bone health. To boost serotonin dwell on your wins, your successes, and what you've achieved in life plus eat some complex carbs and foods rich in L-tryptophan like salmon, eggs, nuts, and green leafy vegetables.
- Endorphins are natural painkillers that minimize pain and increase feelings of pleasure. Exercise, especially stretches, increases endorphins and so does laughter, eating dark chocolate, getting sunshine, and dwelling on scriptures.

Good Nutrition Lowers Stress Too

- Drink plenty of water.
- Eat lots of fresh vegetables and fruits.
- When stressed, eat a healthy snack rather than junk food.
- Use good fats (unsaturated fats, omega-3s) found in canola oil, olive oil, avocados, nuts, peanuts, and fish rather than bad fats (saturated fats, trans fats, partially hydrogenated fats) like animal fats and butter.
- Drink milk for calcium and the nutrients that help the body absorb calcium such as magnesium, phosphorous, and vitamin D.

- Eliminate caffeine and processed foods as much as possible. If you must indulge, slowly savor the flavor.
- Use good carbs of whole grain foods rather than bad carbs of processed flour, rice, and grains.
- Avoid excess chemicals and preservatives.

Healthy Habits for Less Stress

- Go outdoors to a garden or park. Nature relaxes people.
- Get regular dental checkups and physicals. An undetected illness adds to stress.
- Add movement whenever possible. Walk instead of riding, park farther from your destination and walk, actively play with your children or grandchildren, take walks during breaks, and do household chores manually.
- Stand tall, with good posture. Poor posture stresses the body.
- Rest and sleep regularly.

Exercise for Less Stress

- Consult your doctor before beginning exercise programs.
- Jesus walked often and climbed mountains. (Matthew 15:29)
- Walk. Vary walks between long and short ones. Walk in place for several minutes during breaks.
- Gentle stretching helps the body stay flexible, relaxes muscles, and keeps bones from being stressed.
- Exercise releases tranquilizing chemicals called endorphins.
- Aerobic exercise (walking, swimming, dancing, etc.) builds endurance and strengthens the heart, decreases blood pressure, helps manage weight, and increases resistance to illness. These benefits reduce stress.
- Aerobic exercise is cumulative even if done in ten-minute segments.
- Short-term effects of aerobic exercise can last as long as 36 hours.

Recipe for Peace

Fill heart with unconditional love then stir in prayer and Bible study.

Stir in generous amounts of kindness, patience and encouraging smiles.

Add hugs daily.

Mix with friendship.

Top it off with a sprinkle of humor.

For living in peace get Karen's Book [Growing a Peaceful Heart](#) and other devotions

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