

Synopsis of Nutrition Talk*

Work Hard – Play Hard – Eat Right!

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Stress is an integral part of daily life. During stress, blood pressure, breathing and pulse rate rise, muscles tense, and blood vessels constrict. We acknowledge that although a little bit stress can increase one's productivity, too much or long-term stress that is not dealt with effectively, can affect mental and physical health.

During stress, one's eating habit may change. When unhealthy eat habit continues over time, he or she is at risk of not getting enough nutrients. In such a case, the body response less efficiently and body defense system may not be at its optimal level.

Women and men have different food preferences during stress. In most cases, the characteristics of these 'comfort foods' are:

- Sweet and rich
- Usually of either hot or cold temperatures
- Usually of a certain texture

Sweet foods are broken down to carbohydrate, a compound that can regulate the level of serotonin in the brain. Serotonin is a brain chemical responsible for the feeling of optimism, relaxation, general sense of well-being and the ability to focus and concentrate. Besides sweet foods, one can choose carbohydrate-rich foods – those found on the 1st level of the Healthy Diet Pyramid – and achieve the same serotonin effect. Choose starchy foods as healthier alternatives, including plain bread & rolls, plain baked potatoes, rice pudding, glutinous rice, and others.

Rich foods give the 'melt-in-the-mouth' feel that can elevate moods. Certain fats, such as omega-3 fatty acids, are also important to build protective covers around the nerves. Consume foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as fatty fish, nuts, and seeds.

The more a person is stressed, the greater the need to support the body's defense system. It is advisable to concentrate on foods that can boost the immune system, such as garlic and essence of chicken. Some nutrients that can also improve one's immunity are vitamin C, iron, and zinc.

Vitamin C is found abundantly in citrus fruits, guava, mango, papaya, and kiwi, as well as green leafy vegetables, broccoli, and cauliflower. The human body needs only 30 mg per day. Besides improving immune function, vitamin C also enhances iron absorption.

Iron is an important mineral for immunity and red blood cells production. Iron in animal-based products has better absorption compared to those found in plant-based products. Some foods, such as vitamin C-rich foods and essence of chicken, can enhance iron absorption. Iron is found in liver, red meat, essence of chicken, whole

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grain cereals, and green leafy vegetables. Take note that women need 3 times more iron than men do.

Zinc is abundantly found in oyster, shell fish, liver, red meat, fish, cheese, and whole grain cereals. Similar to iron, zinc found in animal based food products are more easily absorbed than those found in plant based foods.

To prevent stress-related, unhealthy eating habits, follow the following advice:

- Always have breakfast
- Have regular meals
- Allow yourself to mini-meals

Exercise is an excellent stress reliever. Exercise increases blood flow to the brain, which increases productivity. Exercise also helps in maintaining one's weight and keeps a healthy blood circulation that reduces risks of heart attack and stroke.

Here are the tips to manage your stress, the healthy way:

- Know your Stress Tolerance Levels
- Be a positive person
- Be rational with your goals and timeline to reach those goals
- Spread out major decisions in your life
- Have little breaks
- Make time for yourself – find a hobby of interest, spend lazy hours with your loved ones, etc.
- Allow yourself some time for rest
- Target yourself to work no more than 10 hours a day
- De-stress by exercise