

Stress has been shown to impact many areas of health, and one of those areas your food choices. Have you ever noticed when you have a stressful day you snack more, or maybe you decide to make today your “cheat” day? When we feel stressed, we tend to crave more comfort foods that contain large amounts of saturated fats and added sugars. So, you may be asking yourself, are there healthier foods that can reduce stress, or can I make my comfort foods healthier? Of course!

Can nutrients help relieve stress?

Research is still limited in this area, but recent studies have begun to look at nutrients that are needed for the brain to function normally, which is beneficial in stress management. Some of the nutrients that these studies focus on are antioxidants and B vitamins. Large amounts of antioxidants are found in bright colored fruits and vegetables. B vitamins can also be found in fruits and vegetables and in beans, dairy products, whole grains, and meat. Including a wide variety of these foods ensures that your body is getting all the nutrients it needs to promote good health!

Vitamin D is another nutrient that has been shown to have a link to stress. Just like with B vitamins and antioxidants, research is limited, but vitamin D is essential for good health. Including foods like fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, trout, and tuna), fortified dairy and soy products can increase your intake of vitamin D. Another way to increase vitamin D is getting outside and getting some sunshine. Taking a 15-minute walk outside during a sunny day can help relieve stress in a variety of ways. Your body will make vitamin D and the exercise will cause your body to release hormones which will boost your mood!

How can I make my comfort foods healthier? Check out the tips below!

Add in fruits or vegetables – Try adding chopped carrots and broccoli to your macaroni and cheese. Or add in bananas and blueberries to your pancakes or French toast. Don't forget to add lots of colorful vegetables to your soups and stews!

Use applesauce when baking – Did you know that instead of using oil, you can use applesauce? Substitute the oil with the same amount of applesauce. Get ready for some fluffy brownies!

Add in some mushrooms – Mushrooms have a ton of great nutrients! Chop them up and add them to your hamburger. This is also a great money saving tip! By adding mushrooms, you can split your hamburger between two dishes!

Spices! – Instead of adding salt, try mixing in spices! Bay leaves are great for enhancing the flavor of beef. Garlic and onion powders add strong flavor! If you like a little kick to your food, try paprika, ginger, chili powder, and cayenne pepper! Be sure to add a small amount and try the food so you don't overdo it!

<https://www.eatright.org/health/wellness/preventing-illness/lifestyle-and-managing-stress>