Healthy Habits to Cope with Stress

Do you reach for a bowl of ice cream when you feel stressed or do you stop eating all together? You're not alone. Everybody reacts differently to stress. Studies have shown that stress can cause an increase or decrease in appetite (the desire to eat). Read on for ways to manage your stress in a healthy way.

Food-free ways to manage stress

Be active: Exercise can improve your mood and lower your feelings of stress. Aim for 150 minutes (2.5 hours) of physical activity a week. Garden, go for a brisk walk, dance, do some yoga – every bit counts toward helping you feel great!

Get enough sleep: Sleep helps you to face start off the day refreshed. People need different amounts of sleep, but most adults need about 7 to 8 hours a night. Figure out how much sleep you need to feel good and stay alert, and then try to get this amount of rest each night.

Cut down on caffeine: Caffeine may disrupt sleep and make stress worse. Caffeine is found a variety of foods and drinks such as coffee, tea, energy drinks, and cola soft drinks. Choose water, sparkling water, herbal teas, decaffeinated coffee, or low fat milk instead.

Limit alcohol: Alcohol is sometimes used to improve people's mood, but alcohol can make you feel worse afterwards. Over time, drinking too much alcohol can cause many health problems. If you wish to drink alcohol do so in moderation.

Food-free ways to manage stress

Quit smoking. Smoking can produce a good mood in some smokers. However, smoking can lead to addiction, gum disease, cancer, heart disease, and breathing problems.

Try calming activities. Activities such as yoga, meditation, mindfulness and deep breathing can all help to calm your mind. Try activities that will work for you.

Take a time out: Do something you enjoy that takes your mind off your problems. Have a chat with a trusted friend or family member. Maybe they can help you with the activities and responsibilities that are causing stress in your life.

Coping with cravings to manage stress

More research is needed to help figure out why people crave certain foods. But we do know that sweet treats and high fat snacks are common comfort foods people reach for when they are feeling stressed.

Try these tips to help manage cravings:

- Make sure to eat enough nutritious food during the day. Don't skip meals or let yourself get too hungry.
- Keep healthy snacks on hand. If you are hungry, enjoy a small snack such as fruit and a handful of almonds, cut-up veggies and hummus or whole grain crackers and lower fat cheese.
- Eat a small amount of what you crave and enjoy it. This may satisfy your craving so you won't overeat.