

Recipes



A balanced diet is key to managing the excesses of stress. Try some of the main meal recipes shown below. For eating during the day, prepare quick snacks in advance so you won't be tempted to reach for the donuts!

Asparagus with avocado, beetroot & smoked salmon salad

Bursting with flavour, this salad is full of essential fatty acids and vitamins and is a rich source of antioxidants — great for stamina and keeping up energy levels.

- 1 bunch of asparagus tips
- 1 avocado
- 2 cooked beetroot
- 100 g of smoked cooked salmon
- 1 pack of washed salad leaves

For the dressing

- 3 tablespoons of crème fraîche
- Splash of white wine or cider vinegar
- 1 lemon, juiced
- 1 teaspoon or so of fresh grated ginger
- Black pepper to season

Put the asparagus into a pan of boiling water and cook for 3 to 5 minutes. When cooked set aside to cool. Wash the salad leaves, chop the beetroot and avocado into slices then combine with the salmon and asparagus.

For the dressing

Combine the crème fraîche, vinegar, lemon juice, ginger and stir together. Season with black pepper. Drizzle the dressing over the salad or serve on the side.

Mackerel pâté

- 150 g cooked mackerel fillets
- Zest and juice of ½ lemon
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 75 g crème fraîche
- 1 tbsp horseradish sauce or grated ginger

Skin the smoked mackerel and remove any bones. Roughly flake the mackerel into a food processor then add the lemon zest and juice with the black pepper. Mix to a rough paste, then add in the crème fraîche and horseradish sauce and mix further. Adjust the seasoning then chill in the fridge for 2 hours before serving with salad or oat cakes.

Quick snack – Soy sauced sunflower seeds

Sunflower seeds are a wonderful superfood, rich in health-promoting nutrients and healthy fats. Packed full of protein, they are also useful for stabilising blood sugar levels.

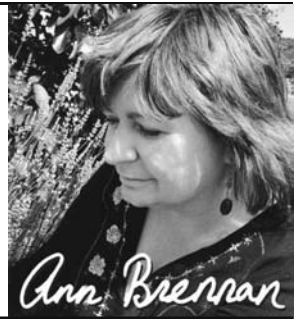
- 100g sunflower seeds
- 2 dashes of soy sauce

Heat a pan over medium heat, add the sunflower seeds. Toss them around and let them toast and lightly brown — don't let them burn.

Pour over the soy sauce and mix it in very quickly to coat all the seeds. Stir for a couple of seconds, no more than 10, and make sure all the seeds are coated and the liquid has evaporated.

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Dealing with Stress

Stress is a normal response to the demands of life. Everyone experiences it. We need it to respond mentally and physically to the dangers and challenges of everyday life. It is not a medical condition, but when it is experienced over long periods it can lead to mental and physical ill health.

While we cannot avoid stress altogether, we can take measures to reduce the harmful impact of prolonged or excessive tension. Simple changes in our day-to-day habits can often make an enormous difference to our health.



See inside for some simple stress-reducing techniques and advice.



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Good stress

Stress is not always bad. We need to respond physically and mentally to survive dangerous or challenging situations (the normal fight or flight response). Stress can energise and motivate us, helping us get things done or learn new skills. Stress, when used productively, can help us see the big picture rather than get caught up in minor details. It also helps us to know which activities we can and can't tackle successfully when the pressure is on, so it is the key to optimising our performance no matter what comes our way.

Researchers have found that it is our perception of stress – whether we think stress is “good” or “bad” – that determines whether it will affect our health. The goal, therefore, is not to eliminate stress from our lives but to help us cope with its excesses and find ways to use stress as a positive force.

Bad stress

When stress is experienced continuously over a long period of time it can lead to mental and physical ill health. Medication may be useful for short periods but can have side effects, and overdependence can cause harm with long term use.

Some symptoms of stress include:

- Not be able to cope with life, feeling out of control
- Irritability
- Indecisiveness
- Poor concentration
- Jumping from one task to another without completing them
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Permanently tired, even after sleep
- Drinking more alcohol or overeating
- Loss of appetite
- Headaches

Beware of the quick fix

When we are stressed we tend to reach for comfort foods that will boost our energy in the short term and give us a temporary buzz. These foods generally come in the form of refined and processed carbohydrates that quickly enter the bloodstream causing high blood glucose levels. Our bodies respond to this by releasing insulin which takes the excess glucose off to be stored as fat. So those quick-fix sugars can lead to us putting on weight. But within a few hours we start to get all the common symptoms associated with low blood sugars: adrenaline and cortisol are pumped into the bloodstream to release glucose stored in the liver, in effect initiating the fight-or-flight response, making us feel even more stressed and anxious. It's a vicious cycle – see the techniques opposite for ways to break it.

Breathing and Mindfulness

If you're having trouble sleeping, or find you can't concentrate on a task, try these simple techniques which focus the mind on the rhythm of breathing, bringing you back into the here and now while clearing away overwhelming or destructive thoughts.

Make each out-breath last longer than your in-breath. This helps stimulate the body's natural relaxation response and can be used at any time that you feel overwhelmed, even during some stressful activity. Simply breathe in to the count of 7, then breathe out gently and slowly to the count of 11. If you find this too long, start with a count of 3 on the in-breath and out to the count of 5.

Let go of your thoughts. Use this technique to relax during a short break, or to wind down at the end of a stressful day. Focus on your breathing, as described above, and clear your mind of any thoughts except the awareness of you breath going in and slowly out. If a thought intrudes, such as, “I'm getting tired” or “I'm bored”, or your head is full of concerns about other matters or worries, just be aware you are having the thought, then gently let it go and bring yourself back to being aware of your breathing. Your aim is to experience the present moment, not to think or make judgements or have opinions. At first you may find your mind is full of these random thoughts in a seemingly endless “chatter” — don't resist or try to fight them, just return to your breathing and let the thoughts naturally subside.

Diet and exercise

Eat little and often (every three hours or so) to keep your blood sugar levels even — your body won't need to release even more adrenaline or cortisol and won't store fat.

Have healthy snacks readily available. Plan ahead and keep them in your bag, desk drawers or even in the glove box in your car. Snacking on sunflower and pumpkin seeds is particularly good as the omega oils are not only good for balancing the blood sugars levels but are great for uplifting our mood.

Include fish in your diet at least 3 times a week – the essential fatty acids they contain increase energy and improve mood.

Get moving! Physical activity will increase your feel-good endorphins and enhance your overall sense of well-being. Exercise increases mental focus and gives your body a way to let that stress go. It doesn't have to be a long session at the gym — a short walk around the block or even a few minutes of stretching will have great benefits if practiced regularly.