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## Lower Stress Through the Holidays and Beyond

By Dr. Theresa Tsingis, D.C., M.S.

The holiday season is fast approaching and if you're like a lot of people that means more stress, and less time to prepare and eat the right foods. Since food can affect mood and stress levels, let's explore how nutrition can help to cope with the challenges of the season and beyond.

First, some nutritional triage - avoid high sugar foods whenever possible. They are craved because the initial effects are to raise blood sugar levels, (causing an initial sense of energy and improvement in mood). Cravings can occur because the maintenance of brain blood sugar is a strong survival mechanism, and sugar is an immediate source for that. But before you unwrap your favorite candy bar, look out. The negative effects of high sugar consumption kick in shortly afterwards that can result in imbalanced metabolism, fat deposition (especially around the waist), and low blood sugar (hypoglycemia). So, to combat both cravings and stress, find a way to plan ahead for healthy eating every 4 hours, a small snack composed of protein, fat and unrefined carbohydrates.

Dopamine and serotonin are some of the "pleasure" neurotransmitters, giving the body a sense of wellbeing. Certain nutrients are required for their production, and when abundant, may encourage more production of these "feel good" brain chemicals. Research also suggests that a cell's environment (which is greatly influenced by nutritional intake) influences DNA unwinding. So, the quality of nutrition can affect the balance of brain chemicals. Said simply "You are what you eat". Said another way, "You feel what you eat".

Let's review 10 nutrients involved with neurotransmitter balance, and possible food sources of these nutrients:

At our clinic, a 44 year old woman with a history of depression and anxiety came in for a consultation. We worked closely with her M.D. and within 2 months, by making a few changes and taking a couple of supplements, she reported a better night's sleep and significant improvement in anxiety levels. Note: one of the changes was regular exercise, because of its documented positive effects on mood (via serotonin levels). We also recommend you always check with your doctor before adding supplements to your daily regimen, especially if you are on medication.

There's so much more to nutrition than eating from basic food groups; at the same time, eating simply rather than simply eating can turn someone from stressed-out to in control. We at Lamorinda Nutrition can help you find ways to keep yourself healthy throughout the holidays and beyond. Happy Holidays!

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