



Honoring God With Our Bodies Through Nutrition:

Stress & Anxiety

■ by Stephanie Shelton, PhD, LCSW

This is the final article in the series *Honoring God with our Bodies through Nutrition*. This article will focus on specific foods that have been shown to assist with decreasing stress and anxiety.

Regardless of the primary reason a client usually comes to seek help from me, the root of the problem is typically related to stress and anxiety. Anxiety is the fear of the unknown and stress is a direct result of anxiety. There are several nutritional guidelines you can follow to reduce your stress hormones and decrease your anxiety symptoms.

Drink Plenty of Water

Dehydration can affect your mood and cause your body to react negatively by increasing stress hormones and produce anxiety.

Limit Alcohol Consumption

Though alcohol may appear to give you a calming sensation as your body processes the alcohol, it can give you an irritable feeling and disrupt your sleeping patterns.

Limit Caffeine Intake

Caffeine is a stimulant and can cause a nervous and jittery feeling in your body. Research has shown negative and positive consequences for consuming caffeine; the key is moderation. If you are having anxious feelings, then you need to consider your caffeine intake.

Eat Complex Carbohydrates

Research has shown that complex carbohydrates increase serotonin which has a calming effect. Complex carbohydrates are also metabolized slower which help maintain an even blood-sugar level that results in a calmer feeling. Examples of complex carbohydrates include oatmeal, quinoa, whole-grain breads and whole-grain cereals. You should limit simple carbohydrates such as sugary foods and drinks. The increased sugar intake can escalate the blood sugar count and cause jittery feelings.



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Eat Fruit and Vegetables

Eating a variety of fruit and vegetables filled with antioxidants can lessen the anxious state, as anxiety has been shown to be correlated with a lowered antioxidant state.

Protein

Protein helps regulate blood sugar and maintains your energy throughout the day. It is crucial to begin the day with protein in your breakfast so you have a good start and more energy. The stability will then result in a more even mood throughout the day.

Omega-3

Salmon and other fish that are rich in Omega-3 should be a part of your diet at least 3 times per week. Omega-3 has many health benefits and recently been shown to have a direct link to reducing anxiety.

Nutritional therapy is helpful with the treatment of anxiety. By avoiding anxiety-producing substances, such as caffeine and alcohol, you can improve your peace of mind. By eating well, you can keep your body functioning in a balanced and stress-free way. Your anxiety level is naturally lowered.



Throughout this series I have shared several nutritional changes that could be made to assist in improving one's mental health. One thing that I would like you to take away from this article series is what Paul told the church of Corinth (1 Corinthians 6:12). What you eat is your choice, as everything is permissible. But remember that not everything is beneficial. It is your choice to eat the foods that are beneficial to your well-being. Remember, dietary changes will not cure any mental health condition but by making smart choices of food items that can help in reducing symptoms you can begin to feel significantly better. ■

Sources
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