

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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January 26, 2007

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### Eating for Stress?

Many people eat more when they are under a lot of stress. The extra calories stick around, usually on our hips, and add more stress. Stress also makes it harder for us to sleep well, or to get to bed early. There's growing evidence that not enough sleep makes it harder to lose weight or keep weight from climbing. But does what we eat have an effect on our stress levels? There might be several ways that the answer is Yes.

In the first place, what we eat can help to soothe our brain and relax a little of the stress. The term 'comfort foods' has become popular recently. They're supposedly the foods we crave when we're stressed out. Most of the foods that fall into that 'comfort food' category are sugary or starchy - think mashed potatoes, bread pudding, ice cream, jelly beans or popcorn.

Is it a coincidence that starch equals comfort for so many people? Maybe not. Stress tells our bodies to put out certain hormones. While some of them prepare us to fight or run away, others pump up the appetite level. At the same time, the increase in some of the hunger hormones makes another hormone go down. This hormone is one that calms our body and soothes the brain. It's the chemical way of describing part of stress.

And guess what - eating starchy foods makes that calming hormone go back up again! So not only do the mashed potatoes and bread pudding remind us of Mom and home and when life was easy, they also calm our brain down. In large doses, these

hormones can put us to sleep, like right after a big Thanksgiving dinner! It really is all in your head!

However, there are other ways to watch your diet to help ease some of your stress. Even though many people swear that coffee doesn't do a thing to them, that caffeine still revs up the nerves. So if you're so stressed you can't get a good night's sleep, try skipping the caffeine. Or at least limit it to only morning hours.

Alcohol is another trickster. A little alcohol often makes us sleepy, that's true. But alcohol also interferes with the type of sleep that is most restful. So the drink or two before bed can put you down, but you'll wake up feeling as if you hadn't slept a wink. Easing off the alcohol might make a big difference.

Do increase the whole grains, fruits and vegetables when you're stressed out. While 'tying your intestines in knots' is a figure of speech, stress can affect how well your intestines work. You might feel constipated, or get diarrhea. Putting plenty of high fiber whole grains, fruits and vegetables through the system helps keep it moving as it should. Their starch, and the sugar in the fruit, will help your body produce those relaxing hormones to calm your brain and help you sleep too.

Plus, all these foods are high in the antioxidants and minerals you need to fight off infections and neutralize the negative effects of those stress hormones. If you absolutely can't manage to balance your diet, take a multi-vitamin. It won't be as good as getting the real things from food, but it will help. Be sure to stick to one that only gives you 100% of the RDA. You don't need to overwork your kidneys getting rid of super-high levels of extra vitamins or minerals.

Finally, get some exercise. Go for a walk. It will help clear your mind to think and stretch the muscles to sleep more easily. If you walk around the Kumquat Festival

this Friday or Saturday, you'll give yourself some gentle exercise in a pleasant environment. And if you bring home a bag or two of kumquats, here's a recipe to help you use them up. It's a quick dinner for 4, chicken with a mild sweet-sour sauce not at all like the thick red bottled version. While chicken is simmering prepare quick cooking brown rice and toss a salad or steam some vegetables. Enjoy!

### Kumquat Chicken

4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts	12-15 kumquats
1 Tbsp olive or canola oil	½ cup raisins or currants
1/4 cup honey	

Wash and slice the kumquats, keeping the juice. Heat oil in skillet over medium heat. Brown the chicken, about 10 minutes on one side. Turn chicken and brown again. Add kumquats with juice and raisins or currants. Cover, reduce heat to medium low, and simmer for 5 minutes. Add honey, cover and simmer another 3-5 minutes, until meat reads 165° F in center of piece. Serve over rice. Serves 4.

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