Nutritional shortages can weaken the health of the body. If nutritional shortages affect the body, undoubtedly, the brain is impacted as well. And if the brain is affected, so are our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Stress can deplete our bodies of B vitamins and reduce its ability to process important nutrients. So it is important to make sure our diets are nutritionally balanced. The manner in which one experiences or responds to stressful events depends as much on diet as it does on coping skills. Eating the right foods and maintaining a balanced diet can help reduce stress and promote higher energy.

Avoid or limit caffeine. Caffeine is a stimulant that actually generates a stress reaction in the body. People who lower or eliminate their intake of caffeine report having improved sleep patterns, having more energy and feeling more relaxed and less nervous. So, next time you want that cup of coffee, make it a decaf.

Other substances. A balanced diet is clearly important, both to avoid direct physical stress on the brain and nervous system, and to reduce stress susceptibility resulting from poor health. Substances such as alcohol, tobacco smoke, excessive salt, steroids, and caffeine work against the balance between minerals, vitamins, mind and body. Obviously then, excessive amounts of these substances will increase stress susceptibility and stress level.

Some simple (and to some, surprising) points about food, drink and diet:

- Try to eat fresh foods instead of processed foods. Look at all the chemicals listed on the packaging to see what you are putting into your body.
- Fresh fruit and vegetables are good for you. Simple and true.
- Add fish to your diet but remember battered fish cooked in hydrogenated cooking oil is not the best option.
- Canned vegetables and fruit often have extremely high salt and sugar content. The vegetables and fruit are good for you, but the sauce isn't if it contains too much salt and sugar. Look at the contents on the label.
- Drink 8 glasses filled with 8 ounces of water a day. A simple tip to add some zip is to squeeze some lemon or lime in the water.
- People tend to buy junk food or greater amounts of food when they are hungry so do not go shopping when you are hungry.
- It takes about 20 minutes from the time you eat something until the hypothalamus in your brain turns off your appetite, so eat slowly.

Please note: Talk to your physician before making significant changes to your diet or taking diet or vitamin supplements. Consult with a dietician or other health professional to set up a nutritional plan that is best for you.

Eat a Healthy Balanced Diet: an Antidote for Stress