

A GUIDE TO
PLANT-BASED
NUTRITION
FOR STRESS RECOVERY



Thulani DeMarsay, PhD

Today, people are under an extraordinary amount of stress, which can have emotional, psychological, and physical consequences. It can rob the body of vital energy, resulting in a myriad of health issues. This guide outlines the important role that plant-based nutrition can have in helping to assist with stress reduction and prevention.

Stress and Nutrient Absorption

You may already know how stress can affect the body, but did you know that it can also interfere with nutrient absorption?

Chronic stress weakens the process of digestion, causing your body to have a much harder time processing food and absorbing the nutrients it is being fed. During stressful experiences, your body produces fewer digestive enzymes and acids that are crucial for nutrient absorption – which may be why you feel queasy before that big presentation or when you are close to a deadline.

Besides hindering nutrient absorption from food, stress can also deplete nutrient reserves within the body.

B vitamins, vitamin C, and micronutrients like zinc, copper, magnesium, and chromium reserves can easily become depleted due to inflammation and oxidative reactions induced by chronic stress.

When you fall short of these nutrients, it weakens your immune system and makes you more susceptible to chronic illnesses.

This is why it is essential to prioritize your dietary needs and make healthy choices in order to combat stress-related health issues.

Importance of Re-Fueling

There are plenty of nutrients that can help mitigate everyday stressors.

Among them, B-vitamins and magnesium are critical, as they participate in important biological processes within your body.

B-vitamins

B-vitamins are essential for the development and maintenance of our nerves. Among B-vitamins, B5 (pantothenic acid) is often called the anti-stress vitamin, as it aids in adrenal gland recovery and supports the body's stress coping mechanisms.

This is important because our adrenal glands are home to the stress hormone, cortisol. Cortisol is released throughout our body whenever we go into a "fight or flight" mode.

When we are under chronic stress, our body is constantly tense, sending messages to our brain that we need to be in that "fight or flight" state.

So, our adrenals continue to make more and more cortisol, working overtime and never getting to rest and recover.

Having the essential amount of B5 can help our adrenal glands to recover more efficiently, allowing our bodies to calm down more easily.

Magnesium

Magnesium helps relax the blood vessels and nerves. It also participates in over 300 + biochemical reactions such as energy production, mood enhancement, and more. Stress has a direct impact on magnesium, and deficiencies of this nutrient can lead to migraine headaches, body aches, and fatigue.

Plant Foods to Your Rescue

A plethora of studies confirm that going plant-based is the easiest and most cost-effective way to better your health. Enjoying plant foods that include plenty of whole grains, nuts, seeds, beans, legumes, and green leafy vegetables provide you with phytonutrients.

Phytonutrients are beneficial compounds that naturally occur in a plant. These compounds have therapeutic effects on your body, and help to lower stress, fight fatigue, and improve mood.

However, just because something is labeled "vegan", "plant-based", or "vegetarian" does not mean that it is automatically healthy!

Although these foods originated from plant sources, they can still be highly processed to the point that they no longer carry their beneficial effects.

The power of plant-based eating stems from its wholeness, which is why I place the utmost importance on eating a whole-food, plant-based diet. Whole food plant-based diets provide all the nutrients that naturally occur in each food item and are not stripped of their nutritional value.

Another reason why plant-based eating is encouraged is due to the fact that conventional farmers raising cattle tend to use synthetic hormones and antibiotics in order to keep the

animals plump and "disease free". So, when you are consuming these animal proteins, you are inevitably consuming these harmful chemicals as well.

Power-Up with Plant Meals

In order to ensure optimal wellness, you can focus on supporting the body and brain with superfoods and well-balanced nutrition. Here are some very easy-to-implement tips:

- Do not skip meals and try to eat three-to-five small meals each day. Since you are going to be eating much more easily digestible foods, you are going to feel hungry much more often. Listen to your body and do not deprive it of what it needs. As long as you are following a whole-foods, plant-based diet and not taking on a "junk-food vegan" diet, you will still thrive while eating in abundance.
- Cut back on the caffeine and try to consume at least 64 ounces of pure water daily. It is recommended to drink at least half your body weight in ounces of water per day.
- Focus on getting most of your nutrients from food sources. If you are opting to take supplements, try to get whole food vitamins. This means that the vitamin you are taking into your body is made from whole foods and not synthetically curated in a lab. Your body will recognize the nutrients much easier in their whole food form, so it will be better absorbed within the blood stream.
- Skip pre-packaged and processed foods. They are packed with harmful ingredients and additives that offer little to no nutritional value. Many pre-packaged foods that you may consider healthy contain loads of sodium.

- Eat the rainbow on your plate - those fresh fruits and vegetables are optimal for your health and wellbeing while providing you with energy.
- If you are not completely plant-based, try to make meat only about one-third of the plate at each meal. The rest should be produce and grains.
- Become a perimeter shopper. People who buy from the produce, dairy, meats, and bakery tend to eat better diets than those who purchase mostly from the inside aisles and frozen sections.
- Drop the sugar, salt, and saturated fats, as these are not beneficial to your health.
- Buy locally and in season when possible. If you can afford to go organic, it is beneficial to you and the planet. When you buy locally and in season, you are also contributing to your local economy and supporting those farmers within your community!

Superfoods for Energy

I like to encourage my clients to always remember that food is an energy source. Just as we use optimal grades of fuel to get the most out of our high-performance vehicles, we need to use a premium diet to fuel our bodies.

In addition to the healthy eating guidelines outlined below, there are foods known as "superfoods" that are particularly high in nutrients. Incorporating these into your diet can deliver powerful health benefits.

Microgreens – young seedlings of vegetables harvested anywhere from one to two weeks after germination – contain up to 40 times more nutrients than their adult versions.

Added to salads or juices, microgreens can provide a tremendous amount of vitamins and minerals to your daily diet. Good microgreen options include young cilantro, red cabbage, celery, basil, and arugula, among others. If you find that these are not accessible to your location or the price per package may be too steep for your budget, they can easily be grown indoors on your windowsill, saving you time and money!

In addition to microgreens, there are other superfoods that can boost your body's ability to create energy and combat fatigue. This list of "must-have foods" includes:

- **Beans** – High in fiber and protein
- **Blueberries** – High in antioxidants and a great source of potassium and vitamin C
- **Broccoli** – High in fiber, calcium, and vitamin K
- **Oats** – Contains fiber that helps to cleanse the digestive tract while managing blood sugar levels
- **Oranges** – Packed with fiber, calcium, vitamin A and vitamin C
- **Pumpkin** – High in vitamin A, vitamin C, and antioxidants
- **Spinach** – Packs high amounts of carotenoids, B vitamins, and various minerals
- **Walnuts** – High in omega-3 fatty acids (which is great for brain help and mood stabilizing!)

Yours in Health,
Thulani



THULANI.COM