

Staying Healthy with Diabetes: Manage Stress to Reduce Complications

Why do we tend to reach for things not good for us when life gets stressful? Could be a natural response, say experts. Hormones released during times of physical or emotional pressure can shut down the area of the brain that controls our ability to make reasonable decisions. Stress can also trigger an appetite for high-calorie foods.

Not all stress is bad. If you're trapped in a burning building, stress hormones trigger the body to release fuel (fat and sugar) into the blood so you can run to safety.

It's chronic stress that can complicate diabetes, educators warn. When the stress response is repeatedly turned on, blood pressure, blood sugar, and blood cholesterol levels climb. Long-term stress can even complicate the ability to recover from illnesses like pneumonia and flu.

The good news: We can help avoid complications of diabetes when we know how to manage life's stressors. Here are some proven strategies:

“Rest and digest.” Take time to calm down and eat pleasant unhurried meals. Less stress around mealtimes triggers improved digestion and reduces spikes in blood sugars.

Schedule time for 7 to 8 hours of daily sleep. Stress hormones are turned off when we are in deep sleep, say experts. And during sleep is when the body and brain repair and restore their vital functions.

Cut out caffeine at least 6 hours before beddy-bye. That's how long it takes for this stimulant to be cleared out of the body for better sleep.

Put a lid on the bottle. Alcohol suppresses REM sleep---the deep, dream-related sleep that

turns off stress hormones and refreshes memory.

Take time to be active. Regular physical activity (like *Dance Out Diabetes!*) calms the stress response and reduces the complications of diabetes.

Pick your battles. People who stress only about things they can control tend to be the healthiest and longest-lived, say researchers.

In stressful seasons, therefore, we are wise to seek “serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

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