



## Nutritional Support for Caregivers: Prevent burnout with delicious, healthy foods and stress-reducing habits

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### About Barbra

I cared for my husband Morris, who had younger-onset Alzheimer's disease. Afterwards, I was compelled to write "Calmer Waters: The Caregiver's Journey Through Alzheimer's and Dementia" in order to help caregivers feel healthier and happier, less stressed, more rested and energetic, and to experience some inner peace.

I have had a long career as a health writer, and I have a certificate in nutrition from the Bauman College of Nutrition and Culinary Arts. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you have about this presentation, or about ways I can support your nutritional needs.

Check out my [healthycaregivingblog](https://barbracohn.com) at <https://barbracohn.com>, where you will find dozens of informative articles about health, caregiving, dementia, supplements, food and more!

Barbra Cohn, MA

- Quality bookstores, online at Amazon, Target, Walmart; public libraries.
- (thehealthycaregiverblog) at <http://barbracohn.com>

## **What you will learn**

1. How food affects your mood
2. Neurotransmitters
3. Making healthy food choices
4. Anti-stress vitamins and minerals
5. 10 ways to instantly feel better

## **What happens when you don't get enough sleep?**

- Decreased melatonin, vitamin D
- Food cravings, weight gain
- Lower immunity ---cytokines, a type of protein, are produced and released during sleep. They create an immune response. Chronic sleep loss even makes the flu vaccine less effective by reducing your body's ability to respond to it.

## **A vicious cycle is created from lack of sleep.**

- The adrenals increase gluconeogenesis, which provides the body with glucose from protein, rather than carbohydrates. This decreases serotonin and melatonin, which results in poor sleep and leads to food cravings for carbohydrate-rich foods in order to uplift mood, which releases more serotonin and insulin.
- Lack of sleep triggers the body to increase production of cortisol, which makes it harder to fall asleep and stay in a deep sleep because on some level your body and brain think they need to stay alert for danger.
- Although insomnia isn't considered a disease by itself, it can lead to numerous health problems. Lack of sleep may result in slower reflexes, irritability, disorientation, dark circles under the eyes, and fatigue. As little as 5 nights of poor sleep can significantly stress the heart.
- Your health, motivation, productivity, mood and energy all depend on getting quality sleep.

## **Sleep promoters**

Foods with tryptophan: edamame, turkey, milk and pumpkin seeds, cheese slice

Foods with melatonin: whole grain crackers with nut butter, oatmeal, popcorn, almonds & walnuts, some fruits (oranges, bananas, tart cherries, kiwis)

Chamomile tea, lavender oil

## **The Physiology of Stress**

What happens to the body during the *fight or flight response*?

First described by Walter Cannon in 1929 (Appleton, New York, 1915)

- Adrenaline is the fight-or-flight hormone: It causes cells, especially muscle cells, to speed up energy production so that the body will be ready to fight a foe or run away. It is needed for short blasts of stress.
- Pupils dilate to sharpen vision.
- Heart rate and blood pressure increase to accelerate the delivery of oxygen to fuel the muscles and critical organs.
- Blood flow is diverted from non-critical areas such as the gastrointestinal tract to the critical areas such as the heart, skeletal muscles and liver

**Chronic stress** –when the body is in a constant state of “emergency alert”

- Cortisol bolsters us in long lasting stress situations.
- When the adrenals get “stuck” in the on position during periods of chronic stress, the whole system goes into chronic “fight or flight.” (Ross, *The Diet Cure*, 46)
- Glucose that is dumped into your bloodstream goes unused, so your body has to produce an enormous amount of insulin to handle it. Eventually, this may result in hypoglycemia or diabetes.
- Fat that is dumped into your blood also goes unused, so it clogs your arteries, leading to cardiovascular disease.
- If you drink caffeine, the stress hormone cortisol becomes elevated, which can set you up for countless health problems including: poor quality of sleep, impaired immunity and age-related deterioration.

**How does food affect your mood?**

- Studies show that those who drink the most coffee often suffer from chronic depression because caffeine depletes the body of B vitamins, vitamin C, calcium potassium and zinc. It increases thirst because it dehydrates the body , and it overstimulates and weakens the kidneys, pancreas, liver, nervous system, stomach and intestines.
- Eating refined carbs releases the feel-good chemical serotonin.
- When you eat too many sugars and refined carbohydrates, or when you skip a meal, you feel your blood sugar drop. Low blood sugar impairs your concentration and judgment, leaves you tired and fuzzy-headed, and sometimes makes you feel irritable. These symptoms often disappear after you eat something and your blood sugar rises. Part of the solution is emphasizing a diet rich in protein and non-starchy, high-fiber vegetables. Both protein and fiber help stabilize blood-sugar and insulin levels, which will help even out mood swings.

**Processed food creates artificial cravings and add empty calories**

A study found that exposure to fast food may make us more impatient.\*

\*Zhong, C. You are how you eat: Fast food and impatience. ♦ *Psychological Science*, Published online before print March 19, 2010, doi: 10.1177/0956797610366090

## **Eating to support health and reduce stress**

1. Eat a protein breakfast

### Balancing blood glucose

Protein triggers the release of glucagons, the hormone that helps provide balance when excess carbohydrates trigger excess production of insulin.

2. Incorporate SOUL (Seasonal, organic, unadulterated, local) foods into your diet  
Whole grains, nutritional yeast, fresh fruits and veggies, dark leafy greens, protein-rich foods

## **Start your day with an energizing breakfast**

Why? To stabilize your blood sugar, so your mood stays even and you can perform at your best. When blood sugar is too high or low it's a signal to the body to store calories, which adds fat around your middle. If you're nauseous in the morning it means your blood sugar is low. Eat within 1 hour upon rising and by 10am.

## **Breakfast of Champions**

- Top a bagel or slice of whole wheat bread with a fried egg, sliced tomato, avocado, slice of low-fat cheese
- Bagel topped with hummus, tomato, goat cheese
- Spread a tablespoon of almond butter on a piece of bread or bagel
- Yogurt/granola parfait with fresh fruit
- Sautéed greens (kale or spinach) and onion, and a corn tortilla topped with eggs, beans, sprinkle of cheese, salsa
- Oatmeal with almonds or walnuts, prunes, cinnamon, flax seed meal
- Spinach mushroom omelet with salsa, berries and wheat toast
- Whole-grain mini-quiche with ½ cup of berries
- Multi-grain hot cereal with Greek yoghurt, fruit and almonds

## **Hydrate!**

Hydrate---our body is 50-65% water. The brain and heart are composed of 73% water, and the lungs are about 83% water. Choose smoothies, fresh juices, water, herbal teas

## **Brain Food**

Salmon, greens, avocado, nuts, berries, olive oil, fresh fruits and veggies.

## **Mushrooms**

All types, but especially oyster mushrooms, contain active ingredients that have been found to reduce Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) if eaten 2x a week, or for a total of 1 ½ cups per week.

## **Neurotransmitters**

**Neurotransmitters are the brain chemicals that communicate information throughout your brain and body.** The brain uses neurotransmitters to tell your heart to beat, your lungs to breathe, and your stomach to digest. They can also affect mood, sleep,

concentration, weight, and can cause adverse symptoms when they are out of balance. Neurotransmitter levels can be depleted many ways. It is estimated that 86% of Americans have suboptimal neurotransmitter levels. Stress, poor diet--protein deficiency, poor digestion, poor blood sugar control, drug (prescription and recreational), alcohol and caffeine can deplete them. (Emmons, *The Chemistry of Joy*, 2006).

### **Serotonin is necessary for a stable mood.**

A deficiency and/or stress can result in depression, irritability, sudden tears, insomnia, anxiety, or panic attacks, binge eating, carbohydrate craving. When chronic stress is combined with nutrient deficiencies because of poor eating habits the risk of mood disorders can increase.

- **Foods that enhance serotonin:** Salmon, Soy, turkey, cheese, eggs, spinach, cottage cheese, nuts, milk, avocado, meat, chocolate
  - Activities that enhance **serotonin:** cross crawl movement, as in swimming, hiking, biking

**Dopamine keeps us focused and motivated.** Dopamine is sometimes referred to as a “gas pedal” neurotransmitter.

A deficiency can result in depressed mood, excessive sleeping, weight gain, obesity, lack of energy, addictions.

- Activities like listening to rock & roll music, tennis, rock climbing, action sports, attending an exciting show or concert enhance these neurotransmitters. Too much can result in aggressive behavior. When in balance, dopamine increases alertness, wakefulness, energy. Deep breathing, weight bearing exercise and strength training enhance dopamine. **It is depleted by addictions, sugar, cigarettes.**
- **Chocolate** Though chocolate is known for its ability to increase levels of the calming neurotransmitter serotonin, it also contains small amounts of a compound called phenylethylamine, which acts like an amphetamine, stimulating your brain cells to release dopamine.
  - **Dopamine** converts into norepinephrine and they are considered a single chemical. Foods that enhance norepinephrine: Almonds, apples, avocado, bananas, beef liver, cheese, fish, green veggies, lean meat, nuts, grains, pineapple, poultry, tofu.

**Norepinephrine is responsible for stimulatory responses in the body.** Dopamine converts into norepinephrine and they are considered a single chemical. A deficiency can result in depressed mood, poor sleep, fatigue, low energy, poor memory/focus, apathy.

**GABA keeps us feeling balanced and inhibits nerve cells from firing.** A deficiency results in high anxiety, panic attacks, worry, difficulty falling and staying asleep, cognitive impairment.

Too many carbs and refined foods deplete GABA. Exercise, and being outdoors, paying attention to your personal needs are important. Passion flower, lemon balm and valerian help support GABA, and help you fall asleep if your mind is on over-drive.

### **How to boost your neurotransmitters**

- Focus on complex carbohydrates and eliminate junk foods or refined carbs.
- Eat 3 balanced meals and 1-2 snacks/day. Include a high-quality protein with every meal
- Unlimited amounts of fresh veggies
- Eat a good breakfast

### **Herbs relieve stress**

- Adaptogen herbs: Ashwagandha, gotu kola, rhodiola, schizandra, Siberian ginseng, cordyceps, holy basil
- Nervines: Oat straw, passion flower, skullcap, valerian
- Adaptogen herbs support adrenal function, counteracting the adverse effects of stress
- Nervines are beneficial for short-term use, i.e. in treating mild depression or acute anxiety, and in times of stress

### **Make healthy choices**

Choose:

- Water, green tea, herbal teas
- Nuts & seeds
- Avocado, olive oil, coconut oil, butter, omega-3 fatty acids
- Fresh fruits and veggies
- Fish, high-quality protein
- SOUL foods

Avoid:

- Coffee, soda, artificial sweeteners
- Chips, cookies, pastries, candy
- Poor quality fats
- Processed lunch meats
- Dairy products with rBGH (growth hormones)

### **Vitamins and Minerals to Boost Mood**

**Vitamin B complex**

**Calcium**  
**Vitamin D**  
**Magnesium**  
**Omega-3s**  
**Zinc**

**Magnesium** is the most important mineral for the heart, supports healthy blood pressure, decreases food cravings, balanced blood sugar, nourishes and calms the nervous system, protects the body from damage of stress. Besides food, Epsom salt baths another way of getting magnesium--absorbed through the skin

Research shows that people with major depression have less magnesium in their bloodstream. A large Norwegian study of people ages 46-74 found that those who ate fewer foods containing magnesium experienced more depression. It's found in peas, leafy greens, pumpkin seeds, salmon, soy, black beans, yogurt, peanut butter, sunflower and sesame seeds

MAGNESIUM is in leafy greens! Put them in shakes. Buy containers of washed baby spinach and cook it with your eggs.

**Complex carbohydrates**, such as sweet potatoes, brown rice or oatmeal, allow your brain to gradually process more serotonin for the long haul. Eating **protein and healthy omega-3 fats**, found in fish, walnuts and flax, will also improve mood. **B vitamins**, which are abundant in **fresh leafy greens** and in chemical-free, pasture-raised meat, are another important factor because they're needed for serotonin production.

## **MIND Diet**

In a study published in September 2015 in *Alzheimer's & Dementia*, the nutritional epidemiologist Martha Clare Morris and her colleagues at Rush University Medical Center borrowed concepts from the Mediterranean diet and the DASH diet. The result is the MIND diet.

The study followed [923 participants](#), [ages 58 to 98 years](#), for an average 4.5 years, and found the MIND diet lowered Alzheimer's risk by about 35 percent for people who followed it moderately well and up to 53 percent for those who adhered to it rigorously. On a daily basis you eat at least three servings of whole grains, a salad and another vegetable, along with drinking a glass of wine. The jury is still out on whether a little alcohol consumption is better for the brain than none at all. I just heard a panel of researchers and neuroscientist address this issue. If you don't consumer alcohol, there is certainly no reason for you to start now. But if you do, limit your consumption to one glass of wine a day.)

It's advised that on most days you should snack on nuts, and every other day eat half a cup of beans. At least twice a week eat poultry and a half-cup serving of berries (blueberries are best), and eat fish at least weekly. Olive oil is the preferred cooking oil.

**Red meat: no more than 4 servings a week**  
**Butter and margarine: no more than 1 tablespoon (tbsp) daily**  
**Cheese: no more than 1 serving a week**  
**Sweets: no more than 5 servings a week**  
**Fried or fast food: no more than 1 serving a week**

### **Organized meal planning**

- Create a meal plan
- Make a shopping list
- Grocery store delivery
- Pantry staples

### **Cooking for yourself and others**

Variety is the spice of life

Think color

Yummy, easy recipes---Make stews and soups. Buy bags of pre-washed greens. Bake or grill a large piece of salmon. Put 3 ounce portions on top of a big salad. Top with feta cheese, pumpkin seeds, walnuts, berries, etc.

### **Instant stress relievers**

- Walk, yoga, dance
- Meditate & Breathe
- Aromatherapy
- Relaxing bath
- Make art
- Laugh
- Talk to a friend
- Journal
- Music
- Hydrate!

### **Reduce bad habits**

Bad habits, i.e. forgetting to eat, eating on the run, not eating breakfast all contribute to unstable blood sugar and adrenal exhaustion, which makes you grab foods that aren't good for you, so you end up feeling irritable, moody, and even more stressed. (Ross, *The Diet Cure*, 1999). Avoid alcohol, drugs and caffeine.

### **Physical activity is the #1 Stress Reliever**

“If you are in a bad mood go for a walk. If you are still in a bad mood go for another walk.”  
Hippocrates



## **Create a 3-day meal plan**

### Sample

- Breakfast-Oatmeal with chia seeds, flax meal, nuts, dried fruit, cinnamon.
- Snack-Apple with slice of cheese or nut butter
- Lunch-Green salad topped with salmon, beans, quinoa
- Snack-Smoothie with fruit or veggies in liquid of your choice
- Dinner-Spinach or kale, eggs, 1/4 avocado, whole grain toast
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**Be Kind to *Yourself*, as well as Your Care Partner.**

**Do the Best You Can.**