The conclusion of these two researchers is that “modification of the diet and changes in frequency of the diet intake may be helpful in stress management. It is of great importance to eat properly. A large part of the diet has to be of complex carbohydrates. In general, foods of plant origin have to be preferred. Reduction and modification of dietary fat may be helpful. In particular, a diet rich in monounsaturated and omega-3 fatty acids is advisable. These modifications can produce consistent changes in concentrations of cortisol [a stress hormone]. Further, plant foods are rich in phytochemicals, trace elements, and vitamins, which show a variety of positive effects on health.”

Whatever you do, be on the offensive by planning meals that will curb cravings later in the day. High-fiber foods provide a powerful package of healthful benefits such as vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals, and antioxidants to keep your appetite satisfied and enhance your physical and mental health.

Endnotes
1 Not his real name.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 318.
17 Ibid.

A better understanding of your biology, a cache of lifestyle tools to implement lasting change, and trust in the God who gives the power to change can help you make lasting changes. It is also important to replace negative thinking with an attitude of hope. Otherwise there is no energy for the journey. A vital tool for lasting change in overcoming food addictions is adopting new food choices. As Fred’s story illustrates, plant foods are satisfying and reduce hunger between meals.
Your Fabulous Friend

The advantages of fiber foods are truly impressive. Fiber foods can help you reach and maintain a healthful weight. They are low in calories, high in fill-up value, and may also increase metabolism. A large study of middle-age women found that those who ate more fiber-rich grains, such as oatmeal and whole grain breakfast cereals, gained less weight over time than women who got the least fiber in their diets.5 Intake of three types of fruit a day has also been shown to help with weight loss.4

Perhaps this is why vegetarians tend to have less overweight and obesity.4 Fiber foods can be a tremendous aid in weight loss. Instead of a quick, greasy pizza slice for dinner, why not enjoy a bowl of black beans, fresh cucumber and tomato slices, corn bread, and a slice of fresh pineapple?

When you eat plant foods, you feel full before you eat too many calories. Plant foods are also lower in calories and high in long-term satisfaction, so you don’t crave high-calorie snacks. See Understanding Carbohydrates and Easy Ways to Reduce Your Sugar Intake. Instead of a donut and coffee for breakfast, try a half grapefruit, some fresh strawberries, whole wheat toast with peanut butter and applesauce, and a cup of fortified soy milk.

The slow-release energy from plant foods also helps maintain consistent serotonin levels, which help control your mood, appetite, and cravings through the day. Severely calorie-restricted diets and very high-protein, low-carbohydrate diets cause a drop in brain serotonin. If your serotonin level drops, you may feel down, which may cause a craving for sweets. So, help keep your serotonin levels balanced by eating high-fiber foods that are rich in complex carbohydrates, such as beans, legumes, whole grains, pasta, leafy vegetables, fresh fruits, and nuts.

For most people, meals that are not excessively high in fat or carbohydrates but contain a good balance of both, will be most conducive to sustained alertness and energy, especially in the afternoon.7 Refined carbohydrates such as white bread and pastries cause a sharp elevation of blood sugar, which is followed by a fairly rapid decline. That rapid decline can drop blood sugar levels below normal, resulting in tension, fatigue, and irritability.

Conversely, whole grains and other complex carbohydrates bring a more gradual, steady rise in blood sugar and serotonin, higher-sustained levels, and a slower decline. That’s why complex carbohydrates are the best “octane” fuel for the brain. Instead of skipping meals and fueling up on chocolate to keep going, take time for a wholesome, satisfying meal. Such meals will release energy over the next 4 to 6 hours. Consuming high-fiber foods, especially high-fiber cereals, may be one simple method of reducing fatigue.8

Fiber foods may help reduce emotional distress.9 One group of researchers wrote: “Can what we eat influence mental function? The answer is certainly affirmative; we ingest each day any number of compounds that we know alter mental function. . . . We also think that dietary macronutrients [those nutrients that the body needs in larger amounts] can have an impact on brain function.”10 “Over the past 40 years, several lines of investigation have shown that the chemistry and function of both the developing and the mature brain are influenced by diet.”11

High-fiber foods may also improve brain function because they provide a steady release of glucose, the optimal fuel for your brain. Children who eat breakfast perform better in school, and adults who eat high-fiber foods for breakfast are more productive and think more clearly. Individuals on high-fiber diets also reported fewer cognitive difficulties overall.12

Brain cells are damaged by free radicals. The antioxidants and phytochemicals found in fiber foods can help protect cells from free-radical damage and repair damage when it is done. Foods high in plant fiber are also rich in complex carbohydrates that provide energy.

A special benefit of consuming a wide variety of fiber-rich green and yellow vegetables is that they contain many different types of carotenoids. An interesting study revealed that some of these carotenoids, such as beta-carotene, actually have a stress hormone-lowering effect when consumed on a regular basis. They have also been associated with lower levels of irritation and insomnia.13 In one study, participants who had high blood levels of carotenoids had less irritability and sleeplessness.14

In a discussion of nutrition on stress management, researchers Ali Waladkhani and Michael Clemens noted that “plant foods have a wide variety of phytochemicals that have the potential to modulate stress, e.g., carotenoids, flavonoids, and sulfides.”13

In Waladkhani and Clemens’ study, monkeys who were switched from their customary vegetarian diet to a typical Western diet showed altered testosterone levels. The researchers remarked: “Changes in nutritional behavior could cause changes in endocrine balance and eventually in stress response.”15

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