

## Stress-Free Eating: Foods That Reduce Cortisol Levels

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**Cortisol**, known as the stress hormone, is one of the body's instinctual response hormones to the fight-or-flight situation. It is released by the adrenal gland during times of stress and has several functions in the body, such as blood-pressure regulation, glucose mobilization, and reducing inflammation. However, although beneficial and even crucial in many aspects, chronically increased levels of cortisol will impede your body's overall health.

Cortisol is one of the hormones responsible for tearing down muscle tissue. It also increases fat stores, particularly in the abdominal area. One way to keep this destructive hormone lowered is to avoid stressful situations as much as possible. Another way to lower cortisol levels is via a proper, well-balanced diet with the right nutrients. Research suggests certain nutritional strategies may help to reduce levels of cortisol in the body. Here are a few to consider:

*Omega-3 Fatty Acids:* Studies reveal that taking fish oil for as little as three weeks reduces cortisol levels compared to placebo.<sup>1</sup> Wild Alaskan salmon is one of the premium choices for **omega-3s**. Other foods high in omega-3 fatty acids include halibut, walnuts, almonds, and flax seed oil.



*Vitamin C:* Increasing your intake of vitamin C, which is found in citrus fruits such as oranges, as well as bell peppers and dark green leafy vegetables, could reduce cortisol levels. A research study conducted at the University of Alabama<sup>2</sup> concluded that rats supplemented with vitamin C had reduced levels of cortisol after a stressful event compared to those receiving a placebo.

*Low-GI Foods:* Low-glycemic-index foods can lower cortisol levels in your body.<sup>3</sup> It is recommended to consume foods such as eggs, meat, poultry, fish, and vegetables to lower cortisol levels. [High-glycemic-index](#) foods containing large amounts of sugar or starch are poor choices for reducing this hormone level, and may even increase the level of cortisol in the blood.

High-glycemic-index foods require utilization of almost an equivalent mass of animal protein to keep glycemic balance. It is also necessary to avoid extreme low-calorie diets. Low-calorie dieting is a major stress to the body and increases cortisol production while simultaneously reducing testosterone levels.

*Dark Chocolate:* Good news, chocolate lovers: Eating dark chocolate may aid in relieving stress. Researchers in Switzerland examined the effects of dark chocolate on stress metabolism. At the end of a two-week study, scientists observed that the group given 40 grams of dark chocolate per day experienced decreases in blood cortisol levels compared to the control group.<sup>4</sup>

Keep in mind that in addition to proper diet, getting the adequate amount of sleep (seven to nine hours of sleep per 24-hour span) and a regular exercise regimen are crucial in lowering levels of the stress hormone. Additionally, rose hip extract has been found to reduce cortisol levels and thus reduce stress. You can find rose hip extract at your nearby health food store. And by the way, rose hip extract may also help fight the flu and colds.

## References

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