

Good Health LIFESTYLES

Ask The DOCTOR

Soothe Seasonal Stress

by Jacob Teitelbaum, MD

Q: The holidays are here and I'm so stressed out trying to make everything perfect! How can I relax and enjoy the season?

A: As wonderful as the holiday season is, it can also be a time filled with stress and anxiety. Seasonal expectations, crowds at the mall, mailing deadlines, and cooking marathons can make anyone feel anxious. Add in holiday travel or out-of-town guests and this time of year can become a blur of non-stop activity that can set you on edge.

The first target for taming holiday stress is your diet. If your plate is filled with refined carbohydrates, you may be setting yourself up for anxious feelings. Instead of reaching for that Christmas cookie or jelly-filled doughnut, opt for crunchy fruits and vegetables or a handful of raw almonds. These foods are rich in vitamins and minerals that support the proper functioning of the neurotransmitters that combat anxiety. It's also important to eat protein-rich foods like fish, poultry, or grass-fed beef. These healthy foods

help balance blood sugar and discourage emotional eating.

During the holidays, it's also all too common for people to burn the candle at both ends. Yet a nonstop, on-the-go lifestyle puts a strain on the adrenal glands and lessens your ability to cope with stress. If you find that the demands of the season are closing in, take a step back. Cut back on your "to-do" list, make time for an exercise class, or practice some deep breathing. It's also vital to make sure you are getting eight hours of shut-eye each and every night.

The right supplements can also help you cope. Here are three of my favorites that can keep you on an even keel all through the holidays:

Ashwagandha improves the body's resistance to stress thanks to special plant chemicals known as withanolides. Withanolides serve as important hormone precursors that modulate stress hormones, helping to keep the body in balance. This was shown during a 2012 trial of 64 volunteers with a history of frequent stress. Those taking the herb experienced an average 76 percent drop in the physical symptoms of stress, a 69 percent reduction in stress-related insomnia, 68 percent less social dysfunction, and a 79

percent improvement in depression. Those in the placebo group experienced only negligible improvement. To experience these benefits, look for a supplement standardized to contain 5% withanolides.

Rhodiola quickly promotes relaxation and alleviates anxiety during times of acute stress. In fact, a single dose of rhodiola extract taken prior to a stressful event can prevent stress-induced disruptions in your performance. At the same time, rhodiola has shown positive results with long-term use. One double-blind trial of 161 men that appeared in the journal *Phytotherapy Research* reported that rhodiola supplementation reduced stress and fatigue, improved memory, enhanced concentration and physical fitness, and increased overall well-being. To get all that rhodiola has to offer, choose a supplement standardized to contain at least 5% rosavins and 1.8% salidroside.

Echinacea—You probably know echinacea as the herb that helps you survive the cold and flu season but that's not all it's capable of doing. Most herbs contain hundreds of phytochemicals, and the same is true for echinacea. A group of compounds in echinacea has been discovered that reduces general anxiety disorder (GAD), stress (muscle tension, headaches, restless legs), and insomnia. But not just any echinacea will do. During a recent clinical trial that appeared in the journal *Phytotherapy Research*, Hungarian researchers found that a specialized root extract of the herb significantly reduced stress and anxiety within just three days of use. Better yet, standardized anxiety testing showed that the calming effects persisted for two weeks after treatment. To experience these benefits for yourself, check the label on your stress-specific supplement for *Echinacea angustifolia* root extract EP107 standardized for proprietary echinacosides.

Stress doesn't have to mar this time of year. Simply employing these timely tips can help you rediscover the joy of the season! ■



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