



Chiropractic Newsletter

Well-being

Don't Worry, Eat Happy.

Being stressed or angry at mealtimes can diminish the nutritional benefits of the food we eat. There's good reason to cheer up before we chow down.

My consistent advice is to exercise, pray, meditate, write, listen to music, or even hug the kids and pet the dog before eating. I haven't just been making this advice up as I go along. My source is a giant of healthcare: Walter B. Cannon, who was head of the physiology department at Harvard for many years. The shortest word for this field is psychoneuroimmunology, which is barely descriptive.

Cannon observed that our state of being and our bodies are inextricably linked. Our mouths water when we smell our favorite foods. The nice smell causes saliva and starts the digestive process. The aroma sparks a positive association, and we feel good just being nearby.

All aspects of digestion can be affected by a positive or negative state of mind. Stress out emotionally, or even physically (by, say, forgetting to drink water), and watch the saliva disappear. Peristalsis—

the muscle contractions that drive food from the mouth to the intestines—can stop or slow down. Enzymes can decrease while stomach acid increases. Nutrients may become toxic in the presence of toxic emotions, because of improper digestion.



Cannon observed that stress is a highly individualized factor, completely dependent on how we choose to perceive things. Some people freak out, running around like chickens with their heads cut off, and others breathe deeply and take baby steps to deal with their problems. I'll give you one guess which type of person typically has healthier digestion. Stress happens, but distress doesn't have to.

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The stress reaction is part of the fight-or-flight response we all need to help us deal with a tiger that just moved into the tall grass. It unlocks stored energy and shuts down our ability to eat new food. But we'll feel the same tightness in our gut if we try to eat while feeling depressed about our day in the office. Our bodies can't tell the difference between the tiger and a profound need to cry or shout.

In a small way, laughter has even helped people get over diseases like cancer, because the patient can now fully digest his or her food after relieving stress. Most problems can be handled by laughing, journaling, meditating or praying. A small few need professional assistance. In prayer, the body enters the same state as meditation, a state of ease, and gets the same benefits.

It makes sense that people don't eat while in distress. A depressed person will get no nutritional benefit from their food, causing a cycle downward into more depression and anger. Remember that everything works better when you're happy. Push away from that plate and get your head and heart on straight before eating. Don't worry; eat happy!

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