# Stress and Nutrition

By Clare Gomes, CNC

Stress can simply be defined as our reaction to our external environment, as well as our internal thoughts and feelings.

Stressful life situations often result in unhealthy behaviors, normally under control, to resurface. Diet is one such area of behavior that tends to be abused or neglected under stress. Balanced nutrition, however, is necessary for overall health, and affect's your ability to cope with stress. A healthy body is always able to better respond to the tensions of daily life, and good nutrition is a major contributing factor to good health.

Here are some positive nutritional steps to follow when stress hits:

- Eat a **wide variety** of foods in order to ensure all the needed nutritional needs are being met.
  Focus on whole grain products (breads and pasta), and fruits and vegetables. Protein (seafood and chicken), and dairy products (milk, cheese) are also important, but are better consumed in moderation.
  Consume foods high in potassium (orange juice, peaches, bananas, avocados, potatoes) and increase calcium intake (yogurt, tofu).
- Avoid **caffeine** (chocolate, coffee, tea, colas/sodas). Caffeine is a stimulant that can aggravate internal stress.
- Avoid **alcohol**.
- Avoid **sugar**.
- Cut back on **fats**.
  Stress often increases cravings for high fat snacks or comfort foods. Find small treats that have less fat and sugar that will satiate the craving without adding excessive fat and calories.
- Limit **salt** intake.
  Avoid salty snacks (pretzels, chips, nuts) and restrict the use of salty foods (cured meat, pickles, bacon).
- Take a daily **multivitamin mineral supplement**. Nutritional supplements fight stress.
  Vitamin C ("the anti-stress vitamin") and B Complex vitamins help you cope with stress.
- Eat **smaller, more frequent** meals consisting of foods you enjoy. Make the meal pleasurable, to promote and enhance relaxation.