

## 6 diet tips to help you deal with anxiety

Assignment and exam stress may leave you feeling rather anxious. Have you done enough? Will you get the results you hope for? This stress may have you reaching for the wrong foods while you're prepping. That packet of chips or energy drink may be convenient, but refined carbohydrates and sugar will only give you a short-term energy boost before you crash and you're left feeling rather, well, meh. You don't need that while you're studying!

What you eat can play a large part in helping you deal better with anxiety and, consequently, feel better during a stressful time...or not, depending on what you eat. Here are a few simple diet tips that may help you feel a little less on edge.

### 1. Include protein at breakfast

Protein may help to keep your blood sugar at a healthy level and help you to feel full for longer, so that you don't crave sugar and unhealthy carbohydrates. Protein should also give you more energy for the day. Include low-fat yoghurt, eggs, cheese and peanut butter at your breakfast table. Even oats, and whole-wheat bread and muffins contain protein.

### 2. Eat complex carbs

Foods rich in complex carbohydrates may increase your serotonin, a mood-boosting hormone. Include whole-grain breads and cereals, oatmeal and quinoa in your meal plan. Also include apples, bananas, berries, dark green leafy vegetables, beans, lentils, pumpkin, nuts and chia seeds.

Avoid processed and refined sugary foods and drinks. These contain simple carbohydrates, which are broken down quicker in your body to release energy, but will leave you feeling sluggish shortly after, which may affect your mood.

### 3. Include nutrients

Eat fish, such as salmon or tuna, which are high in omega-3 fatty acids. You could also include flax and chia seeds, walnuts and canola oil in your diet. This may help your body to metabolise and use serotonin more efficiently, boosting your feelings of happiness and wellbeing.

Nutrients such as vitamins C and B6, magnesium, folic acid and zinc may also help your body to metabolise and use serotonin optimally. Fruit and veggies, whole grains, eggs, seeds, nuts, poultry, pork and fish contain some or all of these nutrients. In other words, a balanced diet may be key to overall feelings of wellbeing.

### 4. Drink water

Your body is about 60% water. Dehydration doesn't only negatively affect your energy levels and mental performance, but even mild dehydration from heat or exercise may affect your mood too. Make sure you drink about 2 litres of water every day.

### 5. Limit or avoid caffeine and alcohol

It may be difficult not to drink coffee or tea while studying, or have that drink with your friends on a night out. However, to avoid dehydration, feeling on edge, as well as interference with sleep, avoid caffeine and alcohol as much as possible.

### 6. Be aware of food sensitivities

If you have a food sensitivity, you'll know that it can cause unpleasant physical reactions that may lead to a change in mood, including anxiety. If you're uncertain about whether you have a food sensitivity, consult your [doctor](#). Make notes of when you have food reactions, as well as the food additives in what you eat or drink.

## Speak to your dietician

The best advice for overall wellbeing is to eat a healthy, balanced diet which includes lots of fresh fruit and veggies. For more dietary advice, [Bestmed](#) members 18 years and older, who complete their Health Assessment, can make 3 free Personally Yours appointments with a [network dietician](#) as part of [Bestmed's Tempo wellness programme](#).

### **Speak to your doctor**

Eating well is only one possible solution to reduce anxiety. Make sure you get enough sleep, exercise regularly and make sure you have the right emotional support. If anxiety begins to take its toll on your everyday life, speak to your doctor about the best possible treatments. Bestmed has a countrywide network of medical professionals that could help you.

Bestmed has also partnered with the [South African Depression and Anxiety Group](#) (SADAG) to offer members a free 24-hour mental health helpline, with the aim to support members who experience mental health issues, such as anxiety, by managing its effects, providing additional support and improving quality of life. To make use of this Bestmed Tempo wellness programme benefit, contact SADAG via:

- **Toll-free helpline:** 080 062 7775
- **Email:** [mentalhealth@bestmed.co.za](mailto:mentalhealth@bestmed.co.za)
- **SMS:** 43323