

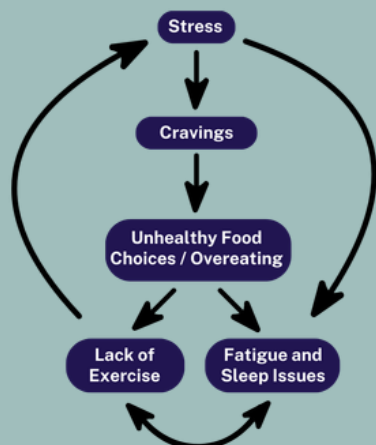
When Stress Hits, Here's What Helps

When you're stressed, your body craves relief. That might look like standing in front of the pantry reaching for cookies or chips, swinging through the drive-thru on the way home, or digging into a pint of ice cream after a long day.

But foods high in sugar, fat, and salt light up the brain's reward pathways, offering a short burst of feel-good chemicals. That's not a character flaw—it's biology. But the relief is temporary. A junk food bender can lead to a blood sugar crash, fatigue, disrupted sleep, and a sluggish body and mind. Motivation to move drops. And the next day, the stress feels even harder to handle.

Over time, this creates a self-reinforcing loop—one that turns short-term comfort into a long-term drain on your energy, mood, and health.

Vicious Cycle of Stress Eating



But this cycle *can* be interrupted. And with a few targeted shifts, it can even be reversed.

How to Break the Stress Cycle

Pause before reacting. The next time a craving hits, take one minute to pause. Try drinking a glass of water, stepping outside, or taking a few deep breaths before reaching for food. The goal isn't to ignore your hunger—it's to create space between the trigger and your response.

Plan supportive snacks. Keep nourishing, satisfying options on hand that won't leave you feeling worse later. Good choices include:

- Apple slices with almond butter
- Air-popped popcorn with olive oil and herbs
- Hummus with raw veggies or whole grain crackers
- A handful of walnuts or pumpkin seeds

Limit ultra-processed foods at home. The fewer hyper-palatable snacks in reach, the easier it is to make different choices when stress hits.

Don't let guilt take over. If you find yourself stress eating, notice the pattern, then move on without judgment. One choice doesn't define you. The goal is to recognize what's happening and course-correct.

Prioritize sleep. Sleep loss disrupts appetite hormones and increases cravings. Most adults need 7–8 hours per night to reset both physically and mentally.

Manage stress in real time. Try stretching, walking, deep breathing, or engaging in a calming activity. Even a few minutes can help regulate your nervous system.

Exercise regularly. Physical activity reduces stress hormones, boosts energy, and improves sleep—making it easier to stay balanced.

Choose nutrient-dense foods.

Certain nutrients support the body's stress response:

- Omega-3s (nuts, seeds, greens) for mood and brain health
- Iron (leafy greens, legumes, whole grains) to fight fatigue
- B vitamins (most whole plant foods) for nervous system support
- Magnesium and zinc (beans, nuts, vegetables) to promote calm and resilience

Virtuous Cycle of Stress Resilience



Over time, these habits begin to reinforce each other. The more consistently you sleep, move, and eat in ways that support your well-being, the easier it becomes to handle stress when it shows up. Instead of spiraling into exhaustion and cravings, you start building momentum in the other direction. That's how a vicious cycle becomes a virtuous one—where every small step supports the next.

Cocoa-Almond Brownies with Raspberry Chia Topping

These fudgy brownies are gluten-free and made with wholesome ingredients that support your mood and energy—like almond butter, oats, cocoa powder, and berries. The raspberry topping adds brightness and a dose of antioxidants, without the sugar crash.



Ingredients (makes 9 brownies):

For the brownies:

- ½ cup unsweetened almond butter
- ¼ cup maple syrup
- 1 egg (or flax egg*)
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- ⅓ cup rolled oats
- ¼ tsp baking soda
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- Optional: 2 Tbsp dark chocolate chips or chopped walnuts

For the topping:

- ¾ cup frozen raspberries
- 1 tsp maple syrup (optional)
- 1 Tbsp chia seeds

*To make a flax egg: mix 1 Tbsp ground flaxseed with 3 Tbsp water and let sit for 5–10 minutes.

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and line a small baking dish (8x8) with parchment.
2. In a food processor or blender, pulse oats into a coarse flour. Add remaining brownie ingredients and blend until smooth.
3. Pour batter into prepared pan and smooth the top. Bake for 18–20 minutes, until set. Let cool completely.
4. While brownies bake, make the topping: in a small saucepan, heat raspberries over low heat until they break down (about 5 minutes). Mash with a fork and stir in maple syrup and chia seeds. Let sit 10 minutes to thicken.
5. Spread topping over cooled brownies. Chill if desired before slicing into squares.