

- Stress

Ask the expert

NATURAL WAYS TO TAME STRESS

Senior Nutritionist at Viridian Nutrition, **Corin Sadler**, guides you through the best ways to deal with the effects of stress in your life

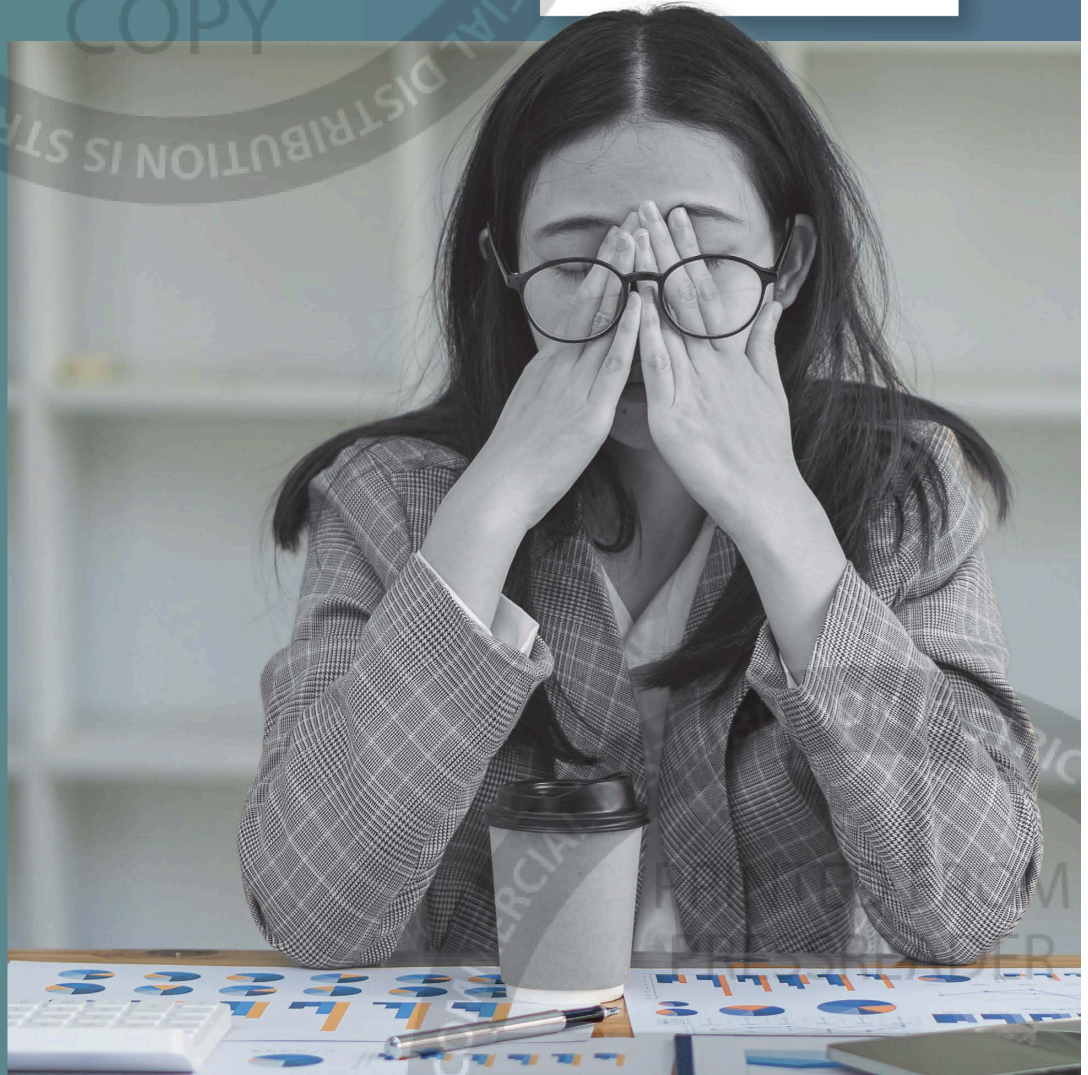
WHAT ARE THE MODERN TRIGGERS FOR STRESS?

Stress is a natural part of life. Some stress is even good for us. Stress helps motivate us or is pleasurable. For survival, we need short-term crisis stress to escape danger. Provided we return to baseline and homeostasis, this type of stress builds resilience and general health. What we don't need is long term repeated stress, which undermines health from hormone and immune disruption to cardiovascular disease and depression. Distress, or generally what we think of as stress, largely comes from modern demands of 24/7 living. Workload, situational stress, social and digital demands, societal and self-pressure, poor sleep, and poor diet. Consuming diets which are high in sugar, caffeine, and/or alcohol all affect the stress response and make the adrenal glands work harder leading to fatigue.



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HOW IS STRESS DIFFERENT FROM ANXIETY?

Broadly speaking stress is the way in which the body responds to stressful events or stimuli, whilst anxiety is the body's way of responding to stress. Both stress and anxiety can involve increased heart and breathing rate, and digestive distress. Stress is typified by moodiness, anger, high emotion, feelings of overwhelm and sometimes nausea, unhappiness, anxious thoughts or feeling alone. Anxiety is felt as restlessness, tension, nervousness, sweating and feelings of dread or unease. Stress is a short-term adaptive response, keeping us safe and returning us to balance after the event. Anxiety can be more long-term, part of a mood disorder, side-effects of medication or a learned trauma response.

ARE THERE WAYS TO CALM STRESS?

Becoming stress-aware is the first step to reducing it. Stress can be obvious, like having butterflies, palpitations, or anxious thoughts, or less obvious, like brain fog, poor memory, irritability, fatigue or cravings for salty or sweet foods. Learning to recognise these signs is key, so try to tune into how you are feeling and how stress manifests for you.

Exercise is a great way to reduce stress as it dissipates stress hormones and releases built-up tension in the muscles. Supplementing with the mineral magnesium can also help as it is needed for the muscle relaxation response and is often depleted when we are stressed as the body needs more of it.

Adaptogens are also an excellent choice for helping reduce stress and improving stress resilience. Ashwagandha is a well-researched adaptogen that has been shown to reduce

symptoms of both stress and anxiety and is well-known for its positive effects on sleep and cognition. Rhodiola too demonstrates effects on alleviating stress, mental fatigue and anxiety, reducing stress hormones adrenalin and cortisol.

Working via the nervous system, lemon balm has been shown to increase GABA levels, the neurotransmitter responsible for keeping us feeling relaxed and helping muscles feel less tense. The amino acid L-theanine found naturally in green tea can also provide stress relief as it increases alpha brain waves, helping relaxation and improving concentration.

Above Ashwagandha has positive effects on sleep

Right Lemon balm is a natural way to calm stress



WHAT SHOULD I BE LOOKING FOR IN A SUPPLEMENT?

It's helpful to put a supplement plan in place to support times of stress and anxiety as the body and brain uses some nutrients more rapidly during these periods. Look for a vitamin B complex with good levels of B5, a vitamin C supplement that provides at least 500mg, and a high potency magnesium supplement. Choose supplements that avoid additives and are sourced sustainably. If you are unsure, seek advice from your local health store. They can offer an array of natural and plant-based supplement, diet and lifestyle advice. To find your nearest one, visit findahealthstore.com.

TOP FIVE STRESS RELIEVERS

Tame stress with these healthy habits

- #1 Keep caffeine, refined fast-releasing carbs, and sugary food and drinks in check as these can induce feelings of stress and anxiety, and trigger production of stress hormones.
- #2 Regularly include relaxing activities, such as meditation, reading, yoga, crafting, or just time for yourself to help reset the brain and body.
- #3 Spend time in nature, walking, gardening or just being. Overwhelmingly research shows this reduces stress and improves mental wellbeing.
- #4 Set time limits on digital time, work and generally don't over-commit your time. Keeping firm boundaries and learning to say no are keys to successful stress reduction.
- #5 Prioritise sleep and ensure you get enough exercise to enhance stress resilience and dissipate stress hormones.

