Thanksgiving is around the corner. This time of the year can be stressful for many people. The holidays can add an additional layer of stress to our already busy lives. With regards to eating, stress can have a powerful effect on our appetite, food cravings, digestion, assimilation, and calorie burning. The helpful tips below can help us avoid the typical holiday FOOD FRENZY!

Consider this analogy: You are enjoying a peaceful walk around campus and all of a sudden an angry dog approaches and begins to chase you. The peaceful walk has now become a frantic sprint across campus and into a building to get away from the dog about to bite your leg. Automatically the body shifts into the fight-or-flight response, also known as the Sympathetic Nervous Response or stress response. This is a safety mechanism featured by the body’s central nervous system that supports us during life-threatening events. The heart rate, blood pressure and respiration increase, hormones that assist in energy (adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol) are released, and general blood flow to the mid-section is redirected to the brain for quick thinking and to the limbs for the strength and power to fight or flee. This also means the digestive system shuts down because the body does not need to waste energy digesting your breakfast burrito as you sprint away from the angry dog chasing you. The stress response is always there when it is required and built in for temporary use (4 minutes or less).

Now picture this: The annoying BEEP, BEEP, BEEP of your alarm goes off after only a few hours of sleep, you jump out of bed, get ready for class/work, and as you walk/drive to campus you chow down on a cold slice of pizza or a granola bar. Once on campus you beeline it to Fire and Ice for a 20 oz. cup of coffee and a burrito because you have a test/meeting/presentation in a few hours and you won’t be able to go to lunch. Thoughts of the test/meeting/presentation are drowning your head and the demands of the day are already taking a toll. The instant the brain perceives stress; the body goes into a sympathetic nervous response as if you are experiencing a life-threatening event. Depending on the intensity of the stress experienced OR perceived in thought, each of the physiological changes that occur when the body shifts into the fight-or-flight response are triggered. This also includes digestive shutdown of some degree. Our body is genetically programmed this way with our safety in mind.

Moving through life at such high speeds sends the message to our nervous system that we are under some sort of threat (stress). If you are always on the go, often times your mind is always on the go as well. Stress is any real OR imagined threat and the body’s response to that threat. Stress, survival, anxiety, fear - ALL THE SAME THING.
If you are living a fast-paced life, chances are you are eating at a fast pace as well. More than likely you are experiencing some form of digestive distress such as heartburn, belching, bloating, excessive gas, cramping, etc. because the digestive system has shut down. This negatively influences appetite regulation, digestion, nutrient assimilation and calorie burning capacity. The remedy - the shift to a Parasympathetic Nervous Response

Relaxed Eating continued...

Cephalic Phase Digestive Response (CPDR): Cephalic means “of the head”. Also known as the “head phase” of digestion. This is our experience of the smell, sight, satisfaction, and overall pleasure of a meal. By smelling our food, noticing it, chewing it and tasting it our mind stimulates the release of chemical and mechanical receptors on the tongue, in the nasal and oral cavities. This phase of secretion normally accounts for about 20% of the gastric secretion (digestive enzymes) associated with eating a meal. This enhanced secretory activity brought on by our full awareness of what we are eating is a conditioned reflex that gives power to our digestive system. When the focus is on one of our senses, our body automatically creates a relaxation response.

Take Time: Give yourself the gift of time with each meal. The world will survive without you for a few extra minutes at each meal. If it takes you 5 minutes to eat breakfast, move it up to 10 or 15 minutes. If it takes you 15 minutes, move it up to 20. Give yourself at least 30 minutes for lunch and dinner. Challenge yourself and see if you can increase it to 45 minutes. Rearrange your schedule so you can find the extra moments to enjoy your meals. Get your family, friends and co-workers on board with you in creating more time and relaxation with meals.

Set the Stage: Your eating environment should be welcoming. Clear the table and sit when you eat your meals. Turn on some soft, relaxing music, maybe light some candles, and open the curtains to allow natural sunlight in or sit outside to get some sun and fresh air.

Deep Breathing: Metabolism requires oxygen and oxygen comes from breathing. Try this simple practice before, during and after every meal or snack: sit comfortably in a tall position and feet grounded, inhale through the nose as deep and relaxed as you can filling the lung's to approximately two-thirds capacity. Pause and hold the breath for a few seconds without any struggle. Through the nose, exhale fully and completely. Repeat this cycle five to ten times. It can take as little as one minute to shift the body from a sympathetic stress response to a parasympathetic relaxation response with slow deep breathing.

But just like every new skill, eating relaxed and slowly has to be practiced on a daily basis. Because frankly, making the change from fast, distracted eating to relaxed, slow eating can be confrontational and it may bring up some resistance. Oftentimes, the way we approach food mirrors the way we approach life. Slowing down with food is symbolic of slowing down with life. Slowing down brings about more awareness and allows us to be more intimate with self. Now is the time to reclaim our intuition and body wisdom so we can enjoy life and our food in the present moment.

Parasympathetic Response

The optimal state of eating is in the Parasympathetic Nervous Response or relaxation response. The relaxation response counterbalances the stress response. It restores the body to a state of calm. When we are in a relaxed state, digestion, assimilation and calorie burning are at their highest.
Guided Gratitude Meditation

In honor of Thanksgiving, I would like to share a wonderful guided Meditation on Gratitude from The Chopra Center. It is a short 12 minute meditation that you can listen to whenever you need a reminder about the many blessings in your life.

The Chopra Center is offering a FREE 21-day meditation challenge starting November 2. Join me on this beautiful meditation journey for the next 3 weeks. Join my NMT Health and Wellness Facebook Group and we can share our experiences, thoughts, and insights in a friendly environment.

Namaste

Soup Recipe

With the chill in the air there is nothing more comforting than a bowl of hot soup. I have so many favorite soup recipes it was hard to choose just one. I hope you enjoy.

Roasted Butternut Squash Soup

Ingredients
1 large organic butternut squash
1 green organic apple, sliced and cored
1 small yellow onion, chopped
2 carrots, chopped
3 tbsp olive oil
2 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp sea salt
½ tsp cumin
1 tsp chili powder
2 tbsp ghee or butter
3 cups chicken or vegetable broth

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. In a large bowl, combine the butternut squash, olive oil, 1 tsp cinnamon, ½ tsp salt, and ½ tsp cumin. Mix together, coating the squash well. Spread out on a parchment paper covered baking sheet.

Next, in the same bowl toss apple slices, onion, and carrots to coat with the remnants. Place on a second baking sheet with parchment paper and add both baking sheets to the oven. Roast for 35-40 minutes until soft, stirring once.

Heat up ghee over medium heat in a large pot on the stove. Add the roasted ingredients and then the chicken broth. Add 1 tsp each of salt, cinnamon and chili powder. Bring to a boil, and then reduce heat to low and simmer, covered, for 20 minutes.

Using an immersion blender, combine the ingredients until smooth, or transfer to a blender to puree. Serve warm.

Recipe by Rebecca Bohl

Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgivings, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings. - William Arthur Ward