

# 5 foods that help lower stress!

"There's no doubt that anxiety can impact the mind and body and make managing blood sugar challenging—but that's not where the story ends," says TODAY show nutrition expert Joy Bauer, RDN. The good news? Research shows that diet plays a role in soothing stress. Calming foods can help stabilize blood sugar and increase levels of feel-good hormones. So if you're feeling stressed, try these five science-supported foods featured in her new book, *Joy's Simple Food Remedies*, to keep tension at bay—and help manage your blood sugar!

## 1. Chamomile tea

Free of sugar, carbs and caffeine, chamomile can help melt anxiety and even bring on sound slumber. Researchers credit the flavonoid apigenin for its soothing properties, according to a study in *Molecular Medicine Reports*.

**SMART SWAP:** When the weather turns cool, substitute your hot cocoa for a mug of chamomile; and when the mercury soars, enjoy a chilled glass of chamomile in place of fruit juice and iced black tea. For a little variation, add a dash of ground cinnamon and lemon peel.



## 2. Steel-cut oats

Steel-cut oats contain magnesium, a mineral shown to help stave off anxiety and depression. Because this type of oatmeal is less processed, it's also considered a lower glycemic grain, so it may not spike blood sugar, says Joy. Bonus? Like chickpeas, steel-cut oats contain the right amount of tryptophan and fiber to release serotonin and boost mood.

**SMART SWAP:** Replace sugary breakfast cereals with ¼ cup of steel cut oats, nuts and low-fat milk. Or enjoy your oats with a side of protein-packed Greek yogurt or scrambled eggs.



## 3. Fatty fish

Consider fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids as your friends. Why? "Research shows that omega-3s, found in fatty fish, reduce inflammation and fight off depression," Joy says. They are also chock full of satiating protein and nutrients like vitamin D, which helps insulin work better.



**SMART SWAP:** Try substituting fried chicken or steak with sardines, salmon, Atlantic char or mackerel. Grill or bake fish with herbs and a few brushstrokes of olive oil, or spice up salads with diced or canned salmon. Love burgers? Try fresh salmon: Its texture makes it ideal for patties.

## 4. Chickpeas

Just one cup of chickpeas provides 14 grams of protein and 12.5 grams of fiber! Why should you be excited? It's considered a slow-burning carb, so it won't spike your blood sugar. Plus, it boasts a good amount of tryptophan, the same feel-good nutrient found in turkey. "It's one-stop shopping," says Joy. "The combo of tryptophan and carbs releases serotonin so you can take on the stresses of the day without getting as frazzled."

**SMART SWAP:** Sandwiches can get a boost from hummus spread (chickpeas, tahini and garlic) in place of mayo. You can also roast chickpeas in the oven with herbs for a healthy snack or use to make your favorite salad more substantial.



## 5. Oranges

These sweet citrus fruits satisfy that dessert craving without throwing your blood sugar into a frenzy. Plus one medium-size orange provides an entire day's worth of vitamin C, which may lower cortisol, the stress hormone that may be associated with anxiety and depression.

**SMART SWAP:** Fill your fruit bowl with a variety of oranges from navel and Valencia to blood and clementine types and ditch the cakes and cookies. Pair with low-fat string cheese and a handful of nuts for a perfectly balanced snack. 

