

Calm down and **CARRY ON**

Go from stressed to sussed with our guide to **CLEVER EXERCISE** and good mood food... BY **RACHEL BROWN**



Grouchy, tired and on edge? Yep, thought as much. Summer (if you can call it that) is already a distant memory because everyday pressures quickly wipe out all of that holiday Zen – and then some.

In fact, a recent study showed Brits are more stressed than we were this time last year.*

It's so unfair considering we've spent the summer doing our best to eat healthily and slog it out at the gym (well, most of the time), both of which are supposed to reduce stress levels. But hang on, it seems certain kinds of exercise can make us *more* stressed out. Argh!

"Some types of exercise stimulate release of the stress hormone cortisol," explains nutritionist Kim Pearson.

This can trigger the body's "fight or flight" response, causing it to store fat around the middle to protect the vital organs as it thinks it's under attack.

Plus, when we're stressed, our diets tend to get worse, not better, as we reach for comfort foods – sugary meals and quick-fix fatty snacks. Double whammy.

But now stress heads can calm

down with these worry-not workouts and chill-out eats.

So if you want to feel – and look – better, ditch the dramas and chill out. We've got the best worry-not workouts and easy-living eats to restore your calm. And breathe...

Worry-not **WORKOUTS**

PILATES

CALM-DOWN LOW-DOWN

Pippa Middleton puts her pert bum down to Pilates, and this clever workout is great for the mind, too. In fact, the whole point of Pilates is that it combines good posture actions with calm and steady breathing throughout.

"We focus on slowing down the heart rate, before working on core strength," explains P-Middy's instructor Margot Campbell of Pilatesontheho.co.uk. Slowing down your heart also means blood pressure is lowered, resulting in a calmer bod and brain.

"Everyone who comes into the studio is calmer when they leave," adds Margot.

LAIDBACK LOCALE Find your nearest class at Pilatesfoundation.com

or DIY at home with *The Perfect Pilates Bum With Margot Campbell* on DVD (£12.04, Amazon.co.uk).

RESISTANCE WEIGHT TRAINING

CALM-DOWN LOW-DOWN

Time to pump some iron in a steady fashion. High-intensity cardio workouts are a massive no-no if you're stressed because they'll raise cortisol levels further. Worried that without cardio you'll pile on the pounds? Never fear.

"Resistance work, aka lifting weights, is really effective for losing weight and won't raise cortisol levels," says fitness expert, James Conci-Mitchell of Six3Nine personal training.

Lifting weights of different sizes and types, depending on your fitness level, also keeps your heart rate steady, while giving your body a varied workout.

LAIDBACK LOCALE Let James and his team at Six3nine.com put you



EASY-LIVING EATS

Food has a huge impact on our mood and an unhealthy diet has been linked to depression and stress. “Following a brain-friendly diet is a great place to start if you’re prone to feeling stressed and anxious,” says Sophie Roberts from the British Dietetic Association. Below are foods that could make you more chilled than Jay-Z in the freezer aisle.

FISH SUPPER

The omega-3 fatty acids found in oily fish – including salmon, trout, tuna, mackerel and sardines – help serotonin (your brain’s happy hormone) to work more effectively. Aim to eat two to three servings of oily fish each week to help stop the strops in their tracks.



SUSHI SNACKS

Stress zaps your energy and makes it hard for your brain to work on full power. Luckily, seaweed found in sushi rolls contains magnesium to relieve stress, pantothenic acid (or vitamin B5) to boost energy and iodine to aid brain function.



AVOCA-WHOAH

Potassium not only helps with anxiety, it also lowers blood pressure. Yep, it really is a mineral-rich wonder fruit when it comes to calming you right down, and avocados are packed with the stuff. Add them to your diet alongside dark leafy veg, which is another fab source of the mineral.



GRAIN ON YOUR PARADE

Carbs can be calming because they raise mood-boosting serotonin levels. You just have to eat the right kinds, such as wholegrains, oats, or brown bread, rice and pasta.



GO NUTS

Researchers have found that people with low levels of magnesium are more likely to suffer from anxiety. Snack on a handful of almonds, which are high in this magic mineral.



through your paces, or find a local gym with weight trainers at Puregym.com.

BRISK WALK CALM-DOWN LOW-DOWN

Health expert, Dr Mark Hamer, is a big fan of a good, old-fashioned stroll. “Moderate exercise, such as walking briskly five times a week, is proven to lower the risk of depression and boost long-term mental health while getting you fit,” he says. “Stick to half an hour at a pace at which you can still talk at the same time for optimum results.”

Take a mate along to gossip with, as studies have shown that having a bit of a sharing sesh can lower your heart rate, reducing stress levels.

LAIDBACK LOCALE For walking routes near you, visit Walkit.com, then work out how many calories you’ve burned with the iTreadmill app (59p, iTunes), which works like a pedometer.

STEAK DINNER

Low iron intake can lead to anaemia, feelings of fatigue and an inability to concentrate – all of which are major contributors to stress. Lean red meat, especially beef, is a good source of iron.



So beef up your next dinner with a feel-good fillet steak.

SUPER-GREENS TO THE RESCUE

Join the green party. Broccoli, asparagus, spinach, cabbage and kale are all rich sources of folate and B vitamins, which help regulate (and even boost) your mood and combat stress by helping the body produce serotonin.



CLUB TROPICANA

Vitamin C has been shown to reduce the effects of stress. Fruits such as oranges, lemons and papaya also boost the immune system, helping the mind and body cope better with anxiety.



GET INTO THE GREEK

Calcium tells your body to release the feel-good neurotransmitter dopamine in your brain. Yoghurt is a great source of calcium, but the Greek version has the added benefit of packing in double the protein and less sugar than other varieties. Stress, what stress? **f**

