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Foods that will bust stress, not your waistband

By ALISON JOHNSON
Daily Press (Newport News, Va.)

The holiday season often brings stress along with fun, but certain foods may help your nerves without packing on pounds.

"There are foods that really do have calming properties based on how their specific nutrients are used by the body," says Gloria Tsang, a registered dietitian and founder of the online nutrition site HealthCastle.com. Here are five smart moves:

- Work citrus fruits into your meals. These fruits are rich in vitamin C, which research has shown may help lower blood pressure during stressful situations. Choose oranges, grapefruits, lemons, limes and kiwis.

- Switch to whole-grain carbohydrates. All carbs temporarily boost levels of the "feel-good" brain chemical serotonin, but many of these "comfort foods" — think cookies and chips — aren't so good for the rest of you. Go for healthier options such as whole-wheat pastas.

- Brew a mug of tea. Green, black and white teas have half the caffeine of coffee but offer the same comforting warmth. They also are packed with flavonoids, natural antioxidants that may help blood vessels relax and lower blood pressure.

- Pick dark green vegetables. Produce such as broccoli, collard greens, spinach and kale are high in B vitamins, which may help fight anxiety.

- Snack on nuts. They're also high in B vitamins, as well as magnesium, a mineral involved in production of serotonin.

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