

7 Stress Busters

Cope with the holiday hustle by arming yourself with these soothing scents and tasty foods. —Amy Paturel, M.S., M.P.H. & Patricia Bannan, M.S., R.D.

1. INHALE LAVENDER. In one 2010 study, British researchers randomly assigned 340 dental patients to one of two groups. In the first, they diffused lavender oil with a ceramic candle warmer before the start of morning and afternoon clinics. With the second group the lavender oil was replaced with water. Their findings: the group exposed to the lavender scent reported significantly lower anxiety levels. And if it works during dental appointments, who's to say it can't work during other stressful times?

2. CUT INTO A COCONUT. When you're stressed, the scent of coconut may blunt your natural "fight or flight" response, slowing your heart rate. People who breathed in coconut fragrance in a small pilot study at Columbia University saw their blood pressure recover more quickly after a challenging task. The researchers speculate that inhaling a pleasant scent enhances alertness while soothing our response to stress.

Sniff, Sniff.

"The part of the brain that processes odors is very close to the [part that houses] emotions and memories," explains Pamela Dalton, Ph.D., M.P.H., a researcher at the Monell Chemical Senses Center in Philadelphia. So when you sniff something you like, you tend to breathe more deeply, your blood pressure lowers and your heart rate slows—all of which relax you.