

WARNING SIGNALS

well. If you're too tense to sleep, then you can't sleep. Stress requires a response that comes from within your head and your heart.

"In a chronic stress situation (stress that has built up over a period of time), the body's response is not always perceptible in terms of physical symptoms, but the response of the brain, though of lower intensity, is of a longer duration," says Dr Vasant Mundra, consultant psychiatrist at Hinduja Hospital, Mumbai.

So whether you know it or not, physically, you breathe faster, your muscles tense up, and the liver produces glucose to send more energy to the muscles. "All this exhausts the body's resources faster, which could impact your immunity," explains Dr Mundra.

The thing to do, say all doctors, is to change your response to stress. But change it how? We're told that we must keep our spirits up, we must spend more time with family and friends, we must maintain a positive attitude. But not all of us are blessed with constantly happy (and stress-free) families, not all of us can see the silver lining in the cloud all the time, not all of us can be happy when, really, we're not.

Dr Mundra has some advice:

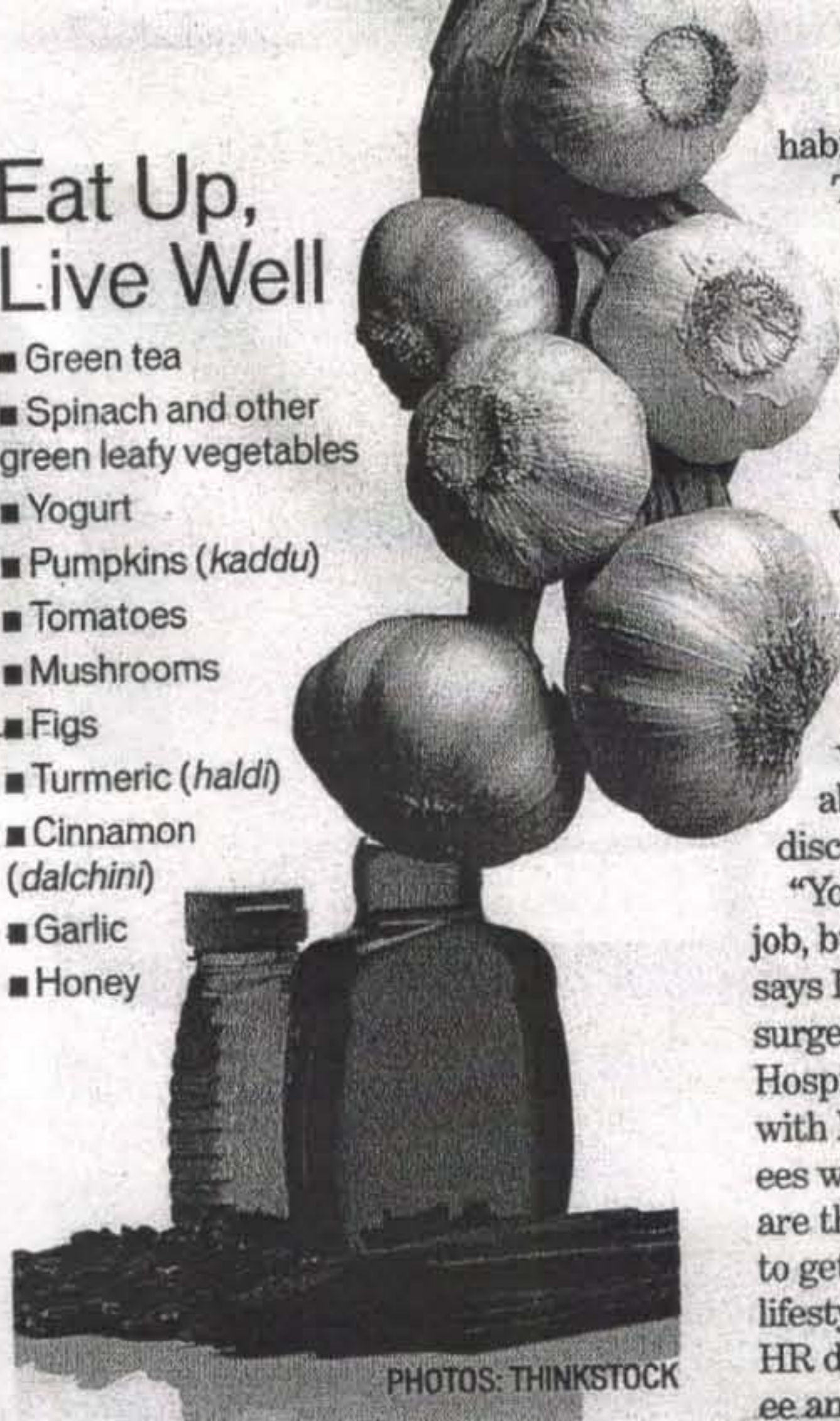
1. See that your response in day-to-day situations is measured. Remember that no emotion is free of charge.

2. Seek to increase the level of good chemicals in the brain - via laughter, exercise and sex.

"Activities like yoga, Art of Living and prayer meetings all help to do this," says Dr Mundra. "Yoga changes your physiological response to brain signals, while satsangs help you by attributing crises to a higher power and reminding you that you don't

Eat Up, Live Well

- Green tea
- Spinach and other green leafy vegetables
- Yogurt
- Pumpkins (*kaddu*)
- Tomatoes
- Mushrooms
- Figs
- Turmeric (*haldi*)
- Cinnamon (*dalchini*)
- Garlic
- Honey



PHOTOS: THINKSTOCK

have to suffer them alone. Even birthdays create situations to force you to change your perceptions - to remember that life is good."

FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

The most important thing to remember, however, is that good health needs discipline. "Success in health matters doesn't come from quick fixes," says Dr Jaggi. "For instance, popping vitamin tablets is not the answer. If you're eating a good diet, you don't need to take vitamin tablets in any case. What matters is doing simple healthy things correctly and repeatedly and making them a

habit. There are no short cuts."

The discipline includes:

1. Good diet with good protein content
2. Regular exercise
3. Limited or no alcohol
4. No smoking
5. Maintaining your optimum body weight
6. Coping with stress and minimising stress levels.

Many of us worry about our health, but doctors have seen that we don't often actually do anything about it, as work interferes with the discipline that we must maintain.

"You may not be able to change your job, but you can change your thinking," says Dr Roy Patankar, gastrointestinal surgeon and endoscopist at Fortis Hospital, Mumbai. "For instance, I work with BPO companies where the employees work on US time and their lifestyles are thrown out of balance. The only way to get them to maintain a healthy lifestyle was to convince the companies' HR departments to offer every employee an annual cash bonus if they maintained the correct body-mass index - and it worked."

The other thing to know, says Dr Jaggi, is that allopathy does not have all the answers. "Allopathic doctors are taught how to treat illness. They are not that clued into the prevention aspect," he explains. "And though the importance of a holistic approach is now being recognised by allopathic doctors, I do believe that alternative systems of medicines are better at both these aspects: prevention and a holistic approach (the mind-body connect). Ayurveda, yoga, naturopathy have a lot to offer."

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THE NATUROPATHY ROUTE

Naturopathy is an art and science of living. According to Dr Rukamani Nair, medical superintendent, Babu Nature Cure Hospital and Yogashram, Delhi, no drugs are used. "We believe that the body has five elements and when any of them are imbalanced, you fall sick," she says. "To prevent yourself from falling ill, we have the 'panch tantra' - five lifestyle ways."

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| <p><b>1 WE ADVISE</b> that you drink three to four litres of water every day, on an empty stomach. Eg: you wake up and drink two glasses of lukewarm water. Then, half an hour before breakfast, drink some more water. Half an hour after breakfast, have some more water. Always drink water half an hour before a meal. Ninety minutes after lunch, drink some more water.</p> | <p><b>2 EAT TWO</b> wholesome meals a day - chappati, rice, dal, subzi, salad, curd. These days people eat what they like, not what they <i>should</i> eat. Your third meal - breakfast - could be seasonal fruit, sprouts, salad. For an evening snack, eat these again. In summer, eat more raw food. In winter you can semi-cook it (except the fruit). For your evening snack you could also have some vegetable soup or lemon juice with honey.</p> | <p><b>3 FAST</b> one day a week. You need to give your digestive system a rest. Either stay on a liquid diet (such as lemon juice with honey, <i>mosambi</i> juice, <i>lassi</i>, buttermilk). Or eat seasonal fruits, salads and drink juices.</p> | <p><b>4 EXERCISE</b> is important. We recommend yoga. Exercise increases circulation so the blood nourishes all the organs of the body including the brain. Metabolism increases and you have joint and muscle mobility. Oxygenated blood reaching all your body cells purifies the system. Yoga strengthens your system, making it stronger against attack by germs.</p> | <p><b>5 ALONG</b> with the body, your mind also requires food in the form of prayer / meditation / chanting / bhajans. Prayer is a must in today's world.</p> |
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- Dr Rukamani Nair, medical superintendent, Babu Nature Cure Hospital and Yogashram, Delhi

The body usually tries to warn us about any major illness. This is usually in the form of certain signals that should not be ignored. According to Dr Hemant Tewari, senior consultant, pulmonology, Fortis Escorts and Fortis Vasant Kunj, Delhi, signals that could indicate diabetes, heart disease and hypertension include:

- Frequent coughs, colds and flu-like symptoms
- Frequent diarrhoea
- Sudden weight gain
- Dry, itchy eyes
- Regular skin problems
- Constant headaches
- Regular chest pain or acidity
- The urge to pass urine at night (nocturia)

According to Dr Vikram Jaggi, director, Asthma Chest Allergy Centre, Delhi, these signs indicate that all is not well with your body:

- Feeling constantly tired
- Frequent headaches
- Frequent sore throats
- Sleeping too much or too little

A general level of 'sadness' when you don't enjoy the things you've always enjoyed.

Feelings of anxiety

According to Dr Aashish Contractor, head of the department of cardiac prevention and rehabilitation at the Asian Heart Institute, Mumbai, these are signs of possible cardiac trouble:

- Discomfort in the chest, neck and jaw areas - the upper body region - which gets worse upon exertion and eases when you lie down
- Shortness of breath doing regular things.
- If you live on the third floor and you're used to walking up to that level, it's fine if you're short of breath when you climb eight floors," he explains.
- But if you get short of breath even when you go up three floors, it could mean trouble."

