F YOU'RE ONE OF THE MILLIONS OF AMERICANS who thinks comfort comes with a side of fries, think again.

USF psychology professor David Diamond's research is challenging the notion that comfort foods high in sugar and fat can serve as a stress-reliever. His recent study found that food containing high amounts of carbohydrates, hydrogenated fats and sugar – foods common in the typical American diet – do anything but make you feel calm and happy in the end.

In fact, the typical American diet could be intensifying the anxiety you're feeling.

Diamond's study on rats, recently presented at the annual meeting of The Society for Neuroscience in Chicago, found the diet that produced the least anxiety was based on the Atkins diet, which is a combination of protein and fat, but very low in sugar.

The researchers also found that the American diet group gained significantly more weight than the groups fed the Atkins or control diets, concluding that a low-carb diet not only helps to maintain a lower body weight but also may help to reduce anxiety.

Diamond's study with USF psychology graduate student Shyam Seetharaman was conducted using rats, but correlates well to humans because of physiological similarities between rats and people.

"Both species produce the same stress hormones, and rats, just like people, will eat just about anything," Diamond says.

Diamond is also a career scientist at the James A. Haley Veterans Hospital, where he has developed a research program designed to help patients who suffer from mood and anxiety disorders. His VA-funded research has le

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