

power up! simple ways to boost your energy

By Marianne Romano MPA, RD, CDN



AT LEAST HALF

the clients I see as a dietitian say they lack energy. One common

culprit? Imbalance. Many of us tend to make unhealthful food choices and pick the wrong times for meals and snacks, while also getting too little sleep and exercise. The good news is that, usually, a few small lifestyle adjustments are all it takes to feel filled with vim and vigor.

The power of iron and vitamin B

Vitamins and minerals help keep energy levels constant, and two in particular play central roles. Low iron levels can cause anemia, which leads to fatigue (and poor immune function). Consider these iron-rich foods: meats, green leafy vegetables, dried fruits, lentils, beans, blackstrap molasses, and fortified breads, pastas, grains, and cereals. B vitamins, important components of metabolic pathways that produce energy, are critical for energy production. Fortified breads, grains, and cereals are loaded with B vitamins, and animal products (eggs, cheese, meats, fish, and poultry) are rich in B12.

Drink up

With its healthfully hydrating effects, water is your best bet by far. Other good choices are decaffeinated teas, which are filled with beneficial antioxidants.

Catch more z's

Sleep recharges our batteries and restores our immune systems, but many of us are chronically sleep deprived. Studies indicate that adequate sleep may provide a renewed sense of energy during the day, while insufficient sleep may perceptibly increase hunger and affect the body's metabolism, making it more difficult to lose weight.

Food is fuel

Giving in to snack attacks is actually a good move, since going too long without eating can cause blood sugar levels to drop too low, which negatively affects your energy level. Try to eat healthfully, getting plenty of iron, B vitamins, and other nutrients.

The energizer

When it comes to energy, exercise is the best medicine. The benefits of exercise are well documented: it releases healthy hormones, protects your heart, reduces stress, and

maintains the balance between calories taken in and the ones you burn.

In addition, regular exercise can increase bone density, reduce stress levels, lower blood pressure, and improve your mood. Build exercise into your daily routine — your trip to Hannaford could include a walk around the perimeter of the store before you do your shopping. This will bump up your pedometer readings every time you visit, keeping you healthy while shopping!

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FUEL FOR THOUGHT

To increase energy, aim for the trifecta of high-fiber carbohydrates, lean protein, and healthy (monounsaturated) fats each time you eat. This combination helps keep blood sugars stable so your energy doesn't spike and plummet. Here's a sample menu I like to suggest.

- **Breakfast:** Nonfat Greek yogurt with bananas, low-fat granola, and orange juice
- **Lunch:** Turkey sandwich on whole wheat, homemade vegetable soup, pear wedges, and nonfat milk (almond, soy, or dairy)
- **Dinner:** Grilled salmon over baby greens, brown rice with mushrooms, fresh berries with nonfat pudding, and hot green tea or nonfat milk
- **Snack:** Vegetables or whole-grain crackers with hummus or peanut butter