

5 Ways to Energize Your Life

Too much on your plate (and we don't mean food)? Here's how to optimize your energy and get it all done.

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Just reading your to-do list is enough to make you tired: Pick up dry cleaning, go to the gym, learn software, plan birthday party, prepare for tomorrow's meeting, et cetera. If only you had the energy to get it all done.

You can have more vim and vigor with just a few diet and lifestyle changes, like the ones below. Try these strategies at home, not to mention at work or at school. You won't be sorry.

Don't skip meals

To maintain your energy level, your body breaks down the food you eat into glucose, otherwise known as blood sugar — the main fuel for your brain — and sends a steady stream of it to your body's cells.

"To feel energized throughout the day, your blood glucose level should stay within a certain range," says Neva Cochran, MS, RD, a nutrition consultant based in Dallas. If your blood glucose drops too low — which can happen if you go too many hours without eating — you could feel lightheaded and lethargic, says Cochran. Your best bet: "Don't go more than four hours without eating something nutritious," she advises.

Balance meals with carbohydrates, protein and fat

It's important to get a balance of food types — no matter which plan you're on. "A combination of carbohydrates, protein and fat helps moderate blood glucose absorption so that your blood sugar rises gradually," says Cochran.

On the other hand, if you eat only carbohydrates, your blood glucose level could rise and drop quickly, leaving you hungry and low on energy within an hour or two after eating. Similarly, if you only eat protein, you'll get calories but

they won't kick in fast enough to make you feel energized, says Cochran, because your meal's missing that carbohydrate-exclusive sugar-boost.

Activate your day

Even though you may feel pooped after your workout, moderate exercise can actually give you energy. "As you exercise, you use blood glucose," Cochran explains. Your body then pulls glycogen (the stored form of carbohydrate in the liver and muscles) into your bloodstream, which can ultimately make you feel **MORE** energized as your blood glucose level rises. To rev up your daily routine, Cochran recommends revving pacing when you're talking on the phone and taking the stairs at every opportunity.

Get an hour's more sleep

To function at your best, the National Sleep Foundation (NSF) recommends at least eight hours of sleep a night for adults. But according to a recent NSF poll, on average, adults sleep just under seven hours nightly during the work week.

With a chronic sleep deficit, it may take you long to execute low-level mental chores such as figuring the tip on your lunch check. And say goodnight to multitasking and making sound judgment calls — especially in crisis situations. All told, "anything that's not routine is difficult to do if you're tired," says Andrew A. Monjan, PhD, MPH, chief of the neurobiology of aging branch of the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, MD.

Nix caffeine

Granted, caffeine can be a quick picker-upper, because it stimulates brain cells. But if you have trouble getting to sleep at night, "avoid caffeine after lunch," advises Sonia Ancoli-Israel, PhD, director of the sleep disorders clinic at the Veterans Affairs-San Diego Health Care System. Besides obvious sources of caffeine — coffee (103 mg caffeine/6 oz cup), tea (36 mg/6 oz cup) and cola beverages such as Diet Coke (46.5 mg/12 oz) — take stock of your diet's hidden caffeine sources, such as chocolate or coffee-flavored foods. Even some decaffeinate coffee has been found to contain small amounts of caffeine.