

7 Top Tips to Improve Your Energy

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Top Tip 1

Always Eat Breakfast:

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Setting off to work or school without fuelling the body encourages the body to head off into a stress response. This is a natural response to enable us to flee the sabre toothed tiger in evolutionary terms, Of course we no longer flee the sabre toothed tiger so one of our stress hormones - adrenaline is left floating in our system, leading to symptoms such as hyper excitability, aggression, agitation, irritability and the need to run off the excess energy. Once this dissipates we feel flat and tired, crave stimulants or sugary foods and the cycle repeats. Being under-fuelled at the beginning of the day can mean we don't catch-up all day, so despite a good meal in the evening we may find ourselves heading for the snack tin. When you think about it we would never run our cars on empty tanks so why our bodies?

The wrong type of breakfast can also be a problem. Highly refined foods such as sugary cereals (cornflakes, rice crispies, fruit and fibre, maple and pecan cereal as examples) cause blood sugar spikes or burst of energy that are very short-lived. These are quickly followed by an energy crash, resulting in hunger, cravings for sugar or stimulants, tiredness, lethargy, irritability, mood swings and the like.

So what's the right type of breakfast? One based on slow releasing carbohydrates with plenty of soluble fibre such as porridge. Nuts and seeds add a little protein and fat to the mix for a good balance.

Top Tip 2

Balance Blood glucose levels:

Highly refined foods are high in fast releasing sugars such as confectionery, white breads, white pasta, white rice, ready-made meals and most breakfast cereals. These foods cause a high rise in blood glucose levels which the body tries to correct by releasing the hormone insulin. This hormone is a growth promoter which shunts all the excess glucose into the fat cells to be stored as fat. Over time the cells become desensitised to the effects of insulin and diabetes can result. Fat around the middle is a sure sign of poor glucose management. Once this balance is lost the risk of heart disease, inflammatory conditions, decline in mental health, loss of energy and decline in general health are all increased. So what can you do to stop this happening?

Eat regularly – graze! This keeps blood glucose levels stable; reducing the size of your meals means not so much insulin is required to keep glucose levels in check. Balance your meals with 1/3 good quality protein (about a palm sized portion) to 2/3 complex carbohydrates (about 2 palm sized portions) per meal. Complex carbohydrates are all vegetables, fruits and whole grains (more about these later). Drizzle a little healthy oil on your meal (more about this later).

Top Tip 3

Eat Healthy Fats:

Fats are a necessary part of our diet. Without fats we cannot absorb fat soluble vitamins such as vitamins A, D, E and K. These vitamins are crucial for the immune system, circulation and blood clotting mechanisms. However some fats are dangerous to the body so please read on to learn more. Unhealthy fats or trans-fats are those that are man-made – margarines are the common known trans-fats as are any oils that we might use to fry (sunflower, safflower, canola, vegetable oils). In their natural state these oils are beneficial to us, however heating them to high temperatures turns them into trans-fats. Ok so what's the deal with trans-fats? Every cell in the body contains fat receptors, cells are all coated in fats as a result. These receptors do not show favouritism to any particular type of fats so if we choose a diet of fish and chips then the trans-fats will be attracted to the receptors. The end result is rigid cells that resemble plastic; that will not allow nutrients to pass in and out. Minerals and electrolytes fail to make their way across the cell membranes resulting in fluid retention and weigh gain. On the other hand essential fats will ensure soft pliable cells that encourage good nutrient uptake. These essential fats also help the cells become more responsive to the effects of insulin, thereby reducing the amount the body needs to release to control those glucose highs. The other good thing about fats is they are high in calories so they keep us satiated for longer. Far from making us fat, the right kind actually help us to lose weight.

Good fats are plentiful in nuts and seeds and their oils, oily fish (Salmon, mackrel, Tuna, Trout, Sardines, Black Halibut). We need a balance of omega 3 to omega 6. Fats also make hormones so if you are unbalanced (PMS, Thyroid, Diabetes) you definitely need to address this.

Top Tip 4

Hydrate Regularly:

Most of us never drink enough. We need around 2.5 litres of water each day for optimal functioning. Those who exercise regularly need more than this. Caffeinated drinks such as coffee, tea, cola and alcohol are all dehydrating. Have you noticed how drinking any of these can make you run to the loo more? In fact for every cup of coffee we should be replacing with one and a half cups of water. That well known “Hangover” is mostly down to dehydration so if you top up your fluids before you sleep you might get away lighter next time. Wouldn't that be nice? A 3% reduction in hydration can mean a 10% reduction in performance. Will that make you think twice about what you fuel up with? Let's look at some alternatives then.

Caffeine free varieties such as Caro, Techino, NoCaf, coffees, Rooibosh (Tick Tock) tea are all herbal teas so they count towards your 2.5L. There are some wonderful herbal teas too – Pukka 3 ginger, peppermint, lemon and ginger, Tulsi tea (many varieties), camomile and of course many fruit teas that can be drunk hot or cold. Adding fresh lemon to water can completely change the taste to something more inspiring. Diluting fresh juice by 50% with water is also good. We do this to help prevent the blood sugar swings from the pure juice.

Top Tip 5

Switch to whole grains:

As I said earlier the white grains such as rice, pasta, breads cakes and biscuits are all fast releasing energy foods that result in a quick energy burst followed by a slump. They contain no discernible nutrients as the husk of the grain has been removed to ensure it will last longer and the weevils don't eat it. Well in my book if the weevils won't eat it then it's no good for me so I do hope you feel the same. We really don't need foods full of empty calories, I'm sure you will agree it is much better to eat something that will feed all those lovely cells in your body rather than drain them as that's what the white foods do. We call the white foods anti-nutrients as they literally deplete the body of nutrients. The husk of the grain is high in fibre and nutrient dense. It contains a lovely mineral called chromium that is crucial for managing blood glucose levels. The high fibre content slows the release of glucose into the blood stream so no big surges – just a nice steady even flow and no hunger pangs or cravings an hour after eating. Some of the best whole grains are wholemeal, granary, multi-seed, rye bread, brown basmati rice, whole grain pasta and couscous. If you find the rice or pasta a little chewy or taking too long to cook try soaking it for a couple of hours before cooking. I leave mine to soak all day whilst I'm away at work. The result – a lovely soft fluffy rice with a gorgeous nutty texture!

Give yourself a treat, go on and enjoy this...

Top Tip 6

Ditch the stimulants:

Stimulants are foods and additives that initiate the stress response, upsetting blood sugar balance and creating havoc within the nervous system. The common stimulants are caffeine and cigarettes, if you are addicted to either of these and wish to stop you may need a bit of help to do that. Don't despair we can support those little stress glands (adrenals) we talked about earlier until you don't need the "hit" any more. Other stimulants are artificial sweeteners such as Aspartame and flavour enhancers such as MSG. In addition to this balancing the blood glucose levels with all the tips you have to do this will help you curb the cravings for these things enormously. You really don't want to have a body that is permanently running on adrenaline, in constant fight or flight as eventually you will hit the brick wall. Artificial sweeteners can be replaced with natural sweeteners such as xylitol. This doesn't require insulin for assimilation or absorption so it's a nice safe alternative. Ask for MSG free when you visit the Chinese take away and be aware yeast extracts such as Marmite make their own MSG. Are you unable to leave this alone?

Top Tip 7

My final Tip of the day;

Follow these rules 80% of the time and enjoy the odd treat:

Some people need a “cast in stone” approach. If you are one of those, then like me, you will no doubt fall into this as a lifestyle change for life. This is fine so long as you are happy with the choices you have made and feel no desire to binge at any point. For those of us with a more flexible soul then you need to know that it is fine to have the occasional piece of chocolate or cake or in fact the odd tippie. All I would say is be mindful of when you have the desire. Try to have your treat after your main meal so you can offset the blood sugar imbalance with the protein in your meal. Also you will be full so will not be tempted to empty that tin of biscuits or cake. Try to ensure you eat before you shop so the temptation to buy that snickers bar is less so. Supermarkets capitalise on our sweet tooth and our hunger as these alone sell more products. So please heed the advice and don't take sole responsibility for keeping your supermarket afloat with your confectionery cravings. It takes three weeks of abstinence to be able to leave them where they are and that's a promise from me.

I hope you have found some useful ways to gain that well deserved energy boost. Please let me know how you get on.

My best wishes for your good health.

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