

Easy fixes for ALL-DAY ENERGY

Combat those daytime slumps and feel reinvigorated with these quick and effective steps to an instant boost

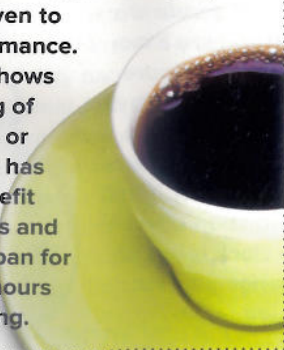


Scent your day

Using perfumes or shower gels with citrus, eucalyptus or mint helps you stay alert. "They send a surge of energy through your body, which clears the mind of clutter and gives you a quick lift," says Joyce West, education chairman of the Aromatherapy Council.

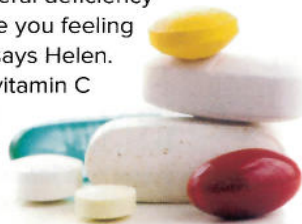
DRINK MORE COFFEE

"There are many myths about coffee, but it can actually be a great aid," says dietitian Helen Bond. It's not a diuretic as is commonly believed but counts towards your daily fluid intake (dehydration is the most common cause of fatigue) and is also proven to help performance. Research shows that 300mg of coffee (two or three cups) has a huge benefit on alertness and attention span for up to four hours after drinking.



Take your vitamins

They're not magic energy pills, but a lack of vitamins can cause fatigue. "B vitamins are particularly important, because they convert energy from food into energy your body can use," says Helen Bond. If you are not getting enough from your diet (if you've cut out carbs, for example), a combined vitamin B supplement can help. If you're still tired, however, you might need your iron levels checked. "Low iron is the most common mineral deficiency and can leave you feeling exhausted," says Helen. Eating more vitamin C will help you absorb more iron from your food.



Say thank you

Those who do feel far more invigorated than those who don't. "Research shows that gratitude makes you feel grounded," says psychologist Dr Cecilia d'Felice, author of *21 Days To A New You* (Orion). "Therefore, people who write down three things they are grateful for each night are less likely to suffer from energy-draining low moods and anxiety."

STRETCH OUT

A good stretch not only increases blood flow to the brain, making us more alert, but it also irons out tension. "A common problem is that hours spent hunched over laptops have shortened our chest muscles, which restricts our diaphragms," says celebrity trainer Matt Roberts (mattroberts.co.uk). A few simple chest stretches after a couple of hours at your desk will also raise levels of oxygen in the blood stream to revive you.

Lighten up

Dread dark mornings after the clocks go back? You could try a light box designed with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) sufferers in mind (from £120, sad.co.uk), which provides summertime levels of light. Using from September before symptoms start and spending between 15 minutes to three hours in the light it produces should begin to provide benefit within seven to 14 days. "Exposure to light stimulates your brain to stop producing melatonin (the hormone that helps induce sleepiness), and is our body's natural signal to get going," explains Professor Jim Horne of the Sleep Research Centre, Loughborough University. >>

PLAY SWEET MUSIC

To help yourself switch gear, turn on upbeat tunes. Music promotes so-called respiratory entrainment – meaning we pace our breaths to the beat (and oxygenate the brain in the process).



Beat the afternoon slump

"The mid-afternoon slump is a true physiological event," says Professor Jim Horne. "Our bodies are designed to have two sleeps – one long rest at night and one short one during the day, and so it's normal to feel a dip after lunch." According to the NHS, we are most likely to run out of steam at 2.16pm. This is also around the time your cortisol level drops, and along with it possibly your mood, focus and motivation. Drinking iced water, say researchers at the University of Chicago, might help you stay awake by setting off tiny pain triggers. If you still find yourself yawning, don't stifle it. According to Andrew C Gallup, a postdoctoral research associate in ecology and evolutionary biology at Princeton University, it may help you stay alert by lowering brain temperature, which promotes mental efficiency.

And breathe

For instant energy, try breathing exercises morning and night. "Spend three minutes focusing on your breathing and tuning into your body," recommends Dr Cecilia d'Felice. "Your brainwaves and heart rate will slow down, your blood pressure will drop and your immune system will be boosted, giving you a surge of energy to take you through to the next stage of your day."

RING THE CHANGES

Doing things differently, like driving a different route to work or using your left hand to brush your teeth instead of your right, can keep you on the ball. The brain responds to novel experiences by releasing a rush of neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, which make you more alert.

Work your wardrobe

If just picking an outfit to put on each day drains your energy in the morning, you're not alone: a study led by the University of Minnesota showed facing multiple choices saps stamina and makes procrastinating more likely. Eliminate one morning stress, therefore, by streamlining your wardrobe. Make things doubly easy by deciding what you're going to wear the night before.



Sleep well

We tend to assume that "early to bed, early to rise" types are more energetic and productive, but that's not necessarily true, says Professor Horne, who says the most important thing is getting enough restorative rest. Homeopath Beth MacEoin, author of *Boost Your Energy Naturally* (Carlton Books), agrees that a truly energised, productive day is only possible after a good night's sleep, and the key to that, she says, is routine. "Having a night-time ritual gives your body clues that it's time to start unwinding. Read something you find soothing or listen to calming music. Most importantly, avoid anything too stimulating in the two hours before bed."



Make a list

Fretting over tomorrow can leave you feeling drained today, but you can end the worry by keeping a diary. "Any form of conflict we carry is hugely draining, but worry is a very personal form," says Dr Cecilia d'Felice. "Put everything you need to do in your diary the day before, and then don't look at it until the morning. That way you've acknowledged what you have to do but are not bringing your worries home with you."

LEARN YOUR RHYTHMS

Whether you're a lark or an owl makes a big difference to how you perform throughout the day. We hit our peak of productivity and alertness for about three or four hours, but when that is depends on our circadian rhythms (body clock). "It's important you find out if you are a morning or an evening person, so you know when you tick best and can figure out some core functioning hours that work for you," says Dr Cecilia d'Felice. To find out your circadian-rhythm type, try the Automated Morningness-Eveningness Questionnaire at cet.org (click on Therapeutic Resources & Tools). You'll get a personalised profile with a close prediction of your "natural" bedtime. However, if your body clock is out of kilter with your routine, it is possible to change your natural rhythms, like you do when you've got jet lag. w&h

