

AVOID THE AFTERNOON CRASH

4 TIPS TO BOOST ENERGY AND VITALITY



Thulani DeMarsay, PhD

Does this sound familiar? You wake up feeling energized and eager to embark on your day – whether you are attending a training session, finalizing a project, meeting a deadline, or accomplishing chores – but once mid-day hits, you begin feeling sluggish and sapped of your energy. Your enthusiasm is hampered, and you are feeling less and less motivated to do anything. If this sounds like you, welcome to the club!

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It's no secret that America is in the midst of a serious energy crisis, which can be directly linked to our high levels of stress, lack of physical activity, and our standard American diet.

By making small changes, you can begin to improve the quality of your life.

To stay energetic, productive and engaged in your daily life, I recommend the following tips:

➤ **Tip #1: Eat a healthy lunch and avoid the afternoon slump**

Nutrition plays a significant role in your energy production and mood; therefore, it is imperative to understand how certain foods can affect your body.

First, I encourage you to consider food as an energy source. Just as we may use optimal grades of fuel to get the most out of our high-performance vehicles, we want to do our best to consume a "premium" diet to fuel our bodies.

Eating the wrong kinds of foods and not drinking enough water can affect your ability to sustain energy, which can lead to low productivity.

During lunch break, many people reach for high-glycemic foods and beverages that are highly processed and loaded with large amounts of sugar and trans-fat.

These foods include baked goods such as muffins, croissants, bagels, donuts; starches like French fries, rice dishes, and white pasta; and beverages such as milkshakes, bottled juices and carbonated soft drinks.

Although sugary or high-glycemic foods may provide us with a short burst of energy, the inevitable crash leaves us feeling fatigued and famished.

In order to satisfy our hunger, we then eat more of the same ultra-processed foods, which only worsens the situation.

This vicious cycle is what leads most people to weight gain, chronic exhaustion, and common illnesses.

High-sugar foods increase our blood sugar levels above the normal range, triggering the pancreas to release insulin. This then stimulates the release of a neurotransmitter called tryptophan.

Tryptophan's main objective is to put your body in a sleepy state.

You can see how this is not ideal when its early afternoon and you still have work to finish and then kids to pick up, dinner to make, chores to do, etc.

The amount of energy you will have by cutting out highly processed will surprise you!

When we eat a well-balanced meal that is rich in nutrient-dense whole foods, we are better able to stabilize and sustain our blood sugar levels – increasing our energy supply for longer periods of time.

When we have more energy, we can be more productive, have more focus, and are better equipped to manage stress.

Here are some suggestions for food choices that will provide your body with the essential nutrients it needs in order to thrive:

Choose complex carbohydrates

These kinds of carbs take longer to digest – resulting in stable blood sugar levels and sustained energy. Good choices for complex carbs include:

- Whole grains such as quinoa, brown rice, whole grain oats, whole grain pasta, buckwheat, and millet
- Legumes such as lentils, peas and beans
Vegetables like sprouts, green beans, lettuce, mustard greens, radicchio, kale, bok choy, sea vegetables, cabbage, mushrooms, avocado, cucumbers, broccoli, cauliflower, bell peppers, bamboo shoots, onions, tomatoes, artichokes, carrots, water chestnuts, pumpkin, etc.

Go green

For lunch, choose a salad with legumes and a plant-based protein or you can choose organic chicken or turkey. Try to steer clear of the heavy cream dressings and load up your plate with raw vegetables. If you need a seasoning or flavor, squeeze some lemon over your veggies with a sprinkle of sea salt, dulse, black pepper, or crushed red pepper flakes.

Eat less

Consuming a large meal takes a lot of energy and effort for your body to digest. This can lead to brain fog, lack of focus, and diminished creativity. Try to eat more smaller meals throughout your day versus the traditional three large meals and see how your energy levels increase.

Choose healthy fats

Don't buy into the low-fat craze. Fat, not sugar, is your body's preferred source of energy. When products are labeled "low-fat" or "fat-free," it usually means that sugar or synthetic chemicals have been added to provide a better taste. So, choose healthy forms of fat like avocado, coconut, olive oil, fish, nuts and seeds.

Munch on an apple

Some reports indicate that apples are more effective than coffee at keeping people awake. If you always find yourself refilling your cup during that afternoon slump, try reaching for an apple instead.

➤ Tip #2: Keep moving

One of the best ways to reduce stress, and condition yourself to handle pressure better, is to stay in good physical shape.

After eating, it is ideal to take a few minutes to do some light exercises, especially if your work life is sedentary.

The standard rule is to engage in at least 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise per day. While this may sound difficult, especially if you work all day, there are easy ways to integrate fitness into even the busiest of schedules.

After eating lunch, go for a brisk walk, stretch, trek up and down a set of stairs, or do some jumping jacks (even if you need to close your office door or do them in a stairwell!). Keep small weights under your desk and do a few exercises to pump blood and oxygen to your muscles.

This may seem foreign and uncomfortable at first, however making it a point to do this once a day, every day will help to boost your metabolism and support your digestive tract.

When our metabolism works more efficiently, our body then has more energy to focus its efforts on other parts of our body, resulting in more overall vitality.

Several yoga poses have energy-boosting benefits as well and can be done right at your desk or in a small area. Back bends, such as camel pose, or spinal rolls on a yoga mat can be very energizing!

👉 **Tip #3: Try some mid-afternoon superfood snacks**

Good snacks to reach for in mid-afternoon are those that will not deplete your energy but boost it. In addition to the healthy eating guidelines outlined above, there are foods known as "superfoods" that are particularly high in nutrients. Incorporating these into your diet can deliver powerful health benefits.

Microgreens

Young seedlings of vegetables harvested anywhere from one to two weeks after germination – contain up to 40 times more nutrients than their adult versions. Added to salads or juices, microgreens can provide a tremendous amount of vitamins and minerals to your daily diet. Good microgreen options include young cilantro, red cabbage, celery, basil, and arugula, among others. If you find that these are not accessible to your location or the price per package may be too steep for your budget, they can easily be grown indoors on your windowsill, saving you time and money!

In addition to microgreens, there are other superfoods that can boost your body's ability to create energy and combat fatigue. This list of "must-have foods" includes:

- **Beans** – High in fiber and protein
- **Blueberries** – High in antioxidants and a great source of potassium and vitamin C
- **Broccoli** – High in fiber, calcium, and vitamin K
- **Oats** – Contains fiber that helps to cleanse the digestive tract while managing blood sugar levels
- **Oranges** – Packed with fiber, calcium, vitamin A and vitamin C
- **Pumpkin** – High in vitamin A, vitamin C, and antioxidants
- **Spinach** – Packs high amounts of carotenoids, B vitamins, and various minerals
- **Walnuts** – High in omega-3 fatty acids (which is great for brain help and mood stabilizing!)

➤ Tip #4: Take a mental health break

Only one in three American workers report that they take a lunch break during the work day; the rest either eat at their desks or unfortunately do not eat at all.

When you're busy and feeling overwhelmed at work, it's tempting to work through lunch and avoid taking breaks, but this type of non-stop performance only leads to increased stress and exhaustion.

Studies show that taking regular breaks from mental tasks can actually improve your productivity and concentration.

Taking a break for even two minutes can increase your productivity by 11%. Even a "microbreak" of 30 seconds can improve your mental acuity.

To keep from feeling burned out and exhausted during your workday, try to do your work in timed intervals versus straight through.

Mental breaks are most effective when taken before they are needed, so attempt not to wait until you feel like you can't concentrate on your work anymore before stepping away from the computer.

If you do feel like you're on a roll and want to keep working, that's okay – working over an extended period when you feel motivated to do so can be invigorating.

But forcing yourself to go on when you are in need of a break is what drains your energy and can lead to a lack of motivation.

Incorporate some of these tactics into your day to boost your energy levels and increase your productivity:

- Look away from your computer screen for at least 30 seconds every hour to reduce eyestrain.
- Take a two-minute break to stand up and stretch. Just reaching your arms above your head sends oxygen to your brain and can help wake you up.
- Step outside and go for a quick walk around the block.
- Practice some deep-breathing exercises. Breathing deeply can release tension and help bring clarity to the mind.
- Take your lunch break in another room and read a book that is not related to your job.

Conclusion

If you have tried all of the above suggestions and continue to be habitually tired, you may want to schedule an appointment with your primary care physician. In some cases, chronic fatigue can be a result of an underlying medical problem.

Keep a journal of how you feel throughout the day, when your energy is low, and how different foods affect your energy level.

You'll be surprised at how easy it can be to find your triggers once you document and reflect daily!

Yours in Health,
Thulani



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