

Foolproof ways to fight fatigue

MORE PEOPLE THAN EVER ARE CALLING THEIR GP BECAUSE THEY FEEL SO TIRED. BUT WHY IS THAT? HANNAH BRITT FINDS OUT AND ASKS EXPERTS FOR THEIR ENERGY-BOOSTING TIPS

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FEELING tired? With the clocks going back and the dark nights, you won't be the only one.



Studies have revealed we are going to the doctors more than ever with symptoms of fatigue. Experts put the increase down to the demanding nature of modern life.

“Our lifestyles are characterised by constant connectivity, high stress and inadequate sleep,” says Sammy Margo, sleep expert for Dreams (dreams.co.uk).

Many factors can contribute.

“The pervasive nature of stress, both at work and in our personal life, creates a perfect storm for persistent fatigue. Blurring boundaries between work and leisure in the digital age often results in extended working hours, leaving little time for rest and recovery.”

Dr Ben Kelly, data director of Nuffield Health (nuffieldhealth.com), agrees. The UK’s largest healthcare charity’s 2023 Healthier Nation Index highlighted that people are getting less sleep than ever.

“They are getting less than six hours a night – a decrease from 2022 and well below the NHS recommendation of seven to nine hours a night,” he says.

“It’s no real surprise as we experience the cost-of-living crisis alongside workplace commitments, busy social lives and families.”

So, what does it mean to feel fatigued? Dr Kelly says: “It sees us wake up feeling lethargic and tired, relying on coffee, and wishing the day away so you can get your head down again.”

If that sounds familiar, read on, because help is at hand.

Here, experts reveal their foolproof fatigue fighters to boost energy levels.

DRIFT OFF

Sometimes a good night’s sleep can evade us. However, getting around eight hours of shut eye is the biggest thing we can do to reduce fatigue.

Dr Kelly shares his three-step bedtime plan, which starts with turning the lights off.

“Lights have a stimulatory impact on the brain, which reduces production of the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin,” he says.

“Blue light from phones and laptops, in particular, is harmful to sleep as it’s emitted at a different wavelength to natural light. Sleep in the dark as much as possible.”

The second step is getting the temperature right so the room is cool, at around 19°C, but not cold.

Dr Kelly says: “A cool room helps to reduce body temperature, which helps initiate sleep.”

Third is shutting out distracting noises, such as from a clicking radiator or traffic outdoors.

“Noise is potentially the most important factor contributing to a poor sleep environment,” he says.

“If you’re unable to switch distracting noises off, try white noise to aid sleep.”

GO BANANAS

One of the simplest fatigue fighters lies in your fruit bowl.

“There’s a good reason why bananas are often referred to as the perfect snack for athletes – they deliver an immediate and substantial boost of energy, as well as containing nutrients that lift mood,” says life coach Simon Alexander Ong, author of *Energize: Make the Most of Every Moment*.

“Bananas contain the sugars sucrose, fructose and glucose, along with fibre, which equate to an instant yet sustained boost of energy. What’s more, bananas contain the amino acid tryptophan, which is key to the production of serotonin and melatonin – two mood and sleep-regulating chemicals in the body.”

HACK YOUR BODY CLOCK

Our circadian rhythm is a 24-hour cycle, part of the body's internal clock. It runs in the background, carrying out essential functions, with the most well-known being the sleep-wake cycle.

"A healthy sleep-wake cycle allows us to feel and function at our best, with more energy during the day and better sleep at night," says Thomas Hoegh Reisenhus, Tempursleep specialist (uk.tempur.com).

"Morning light sets our circadian rhythm, allowing us to feel more alert during the day and sleepy come night-time.

"So be sure to fully open curtains, get out for a morning walk, or even invest in a daylight lamp for the winter months," he adds.

BREATHE IN PEPPERMINT

When it comes to fighting fatigue, you can scent your way to success.

"Basil and lime – either in natural or oil forms – used together are great for clearing the mind and enhancing concentration, especially if you are suffering from brain fog," says Amanda Strowbridge, aromatherapy expert and founder of This Balm (thisbalm.com).

"Peppermint and spearmint are great for alertness, too."

Supercharge your energy levels by putting a few drops of your favourite oil on a tissue behind the radiator in your bedroom or kitchen before you go to bed.

When your heating turns on in the morning, the oils will warm up and fill the room with the energyboosting aroma.

FIVE-MINUTE MOVEMENT

Getting into a simple exercise routine will give you a boost.

"Five-minute bursts of exercise throughout the day are all it takes to boost energy levels," says Anna Campkin, life coach at age-well platform Goldster (goldster.co.uk).

"Even a few minutes of star jumps, a gentle yoga flow or a walk around the block can help."

BLOW UP A JOY BUBBLE

Did you know laughter has been scientifically proven to enhance energy levels? This is because during moments of joy we release endorphins that combat fatigue, stress and low mood.

"Create a joy bubble," says life coach and menopause expert Adele Johnston (adelejohnstoncoaching.com). "It couldn't be easier – think of all the things in life that bring you joy and make you happy.

"Pulling together your joy bubble list will help you when you need a little more fun and laughter in your day."

EAT LITTLE AND OFTEN "Where energy is the issue, it's better to eat small meals and snacks every few hours than three large meals a day," says dietitian Jenaed Brodell. "This approach can reduce your perception of fatigue because your brain, which has very few energy reserves of its own, needs a steady supply of nutrients."

DON'T SKIP BREAKFAST

"A healthy, balanced breakfast will help fuel your mind, body, and performance throughout the day," says Jenaed. Yet, up to a third of us regularly skip breakfast, according to the British Dietetic Association.

"Go for healthier options with a combination of high fibre carbohydrates and protein such as porridge made with berries, nuts and seeds, or scrambled egg on wholemeal toast," says Jenaed.

"This will ensure steady blood sugar release throughout the day as well as keep you feeling full."

HYDRATE, HYDRATE

One of the best ways to fight fatigue is by reaching for a glass of water.

"Hydration is one of the most important, and often overlooked, considerations in overcoming tiredness," says Jenaed.

"Even mild dehydration can cause fatigue and exhaustion, impacting your ability to concentrate."

So, if you feel that your energy levels are flagging, drink up. The NHS recommends we try to drink between 1.5-2ltrs of water a day.

Five-minute bursts of exercise... are all it takes to boost energy levels

COLD SHOWER

Thanks to Wim Hof, ice baths are one of the year's hottest – or rather coldest – trends, boosting energy levels and releasing feel-good endorphins. You can reap the benefits by turning down the temperature in your shower.

"Cold water can help to wake you up and improve your energy levels," says wellness expert Riya Lakhani Kanji. "When you take a cold shower, your body releases feelgood endorphins that provide pain relief and a mood lift. Plus, the cold water also increases circulation, which helps boost your energy levels even more."

■ Looking for a tasty, natural snack to help skip the afternoon energy slump? A snack pack of (£1, Waitrose) contains three Medjool dates, perfect for a quick boost. A good source of antioxidants and fibre, each fat-free trio also provides one of your five-a-day.