

How movement boosts your energy

Words: Lucy Waterlow

You only need a little bit of activity to
achieve some big health gains

It can be really tricky to fit exercise in when just doing your daily activities is already sapping your energy, but research has found that moving more can actually make you feel less tired. This is because doing some movement activates your muscles and improves your circulation. This increases blood flow and boosts the amount of oxygen going to the brain, so you feel more alert. It also releases hormones such as endorphins and dopamine that make you feel good and more energised. So, if you spend a lot of time sitting down – particularly if you have a desk job combined with a commute spent driving or sitting on public transport – then adding small moments of movement to your day can make a big difference to health and mood.

Personal Trainer Emma Bord says breaking the sedentary cycle “doesn’t mean a huge change in your lifestyle or hour-long hardcore workouts.” In fact, if you go from one extreme to the other and start hitting the gym daily, you’re less likely to sustain it.

“It is important to remember that you don’t need to work yourself into the ground seven days a week,” says Emma. “Not all sessions will – or should – leave you sweaty and cream-crackered. Yoga, Pilates and walks are all great for your body and ➤



30 DAYS TO **Boost Your Energy**

mind. The best way to start is with small and consistent movement," Emma advises. "Commit to 10 minutes of movement a day, whether that be a walk, a jog, a stretch, a short strength circuit (Emma has numerous examples of these on her Instagram account @emmabordpt) or even a dance in your kitchen. Add it to your diary like you would a meeting and make it a non-negotiable part of your day. You could try involving your partner or children, which will not only make you accountable but make it part of the family routine, which will benefit everyone. Plus, it can be fun!"

For an extra incentive, numerous studies have found just a little bit of movement could add years to your life. One study that followed 8,000 people for a decade found that those who did 'light activity' instead of sitting for 30 minutes each day had a 17 per cent lower risk of dying in that period. The result was the same even if they broke down the half an hour into periods as brief as a minute each.

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Other studies have found people who are less sedentary are at lower risk of heart disease and less likely to have mental health issues like anxiety and depression. As well as movement releasing feel-good hormones in your brain, you can gain mental health benefits by making exercise social. Arrange to meet a friend for a run or walk, join a group exercise class, or get involved with your local parkrun.

If you can get outdoors, studies have shown being in nature can boost mood too. You don't need to live in the countryside or beside the sea to feel the benefits. Getting out and doing some gardening or just visiting a small green space can have the same effect.

And by being outside in the sunshine, you can boost your vitamin D levels, which gives you stronger bones and enhances your immune system.

As Emma recommends, getting friends and family involved is a good way to stay motivated to keep moving so you're in it together. If you can't physically meet a friend for a walk, you could schedule going at the same time to keep one another accountable, or call one another for a chat while you stroll in different places.

Another way to make the movement a habit is to remember how it makes you feel afterwards. Keep a journal and write down how it felt and how it boosted your mood.

6 simple ways to get moving



Walk and talk

Switch work calls at your laptop and phone catch-ups with friends to ones where you are walking around while talking on your phone. This could be roaming around your own home or office, or going outside and walking around the block. If you are able to meet your colleague or friend in person to walk and talk together you'll both reap the benefits.

Increase your steps in small ways

Walk a bit more while commuting by parking a bit further away from your destination or getting off a stop earlier if taking public transport. You can increase your step count in other little ways when out and about by using the furthest space from the supermarket entrance when parking to do your shopping, or even doing a pub crawl to different venues instead of propping up the bar in one place.



Work harder doing house work

When hanging washing on a long line, leave the laundry basket at one end and start hanging clothing an item at a time at the other end so you're walking back and forth. Similarly, carry items that need to go upstairs individually so you get multiple climbs. Do squats to reach plates when unpacking the dishwasher and put crockery on higher shelves in cupboards so you can do calf raises to reach them.

Movement boosts energy

Reading it back could give you the motivation you need to move when you feel tired and would rather sit and watch another episode of your favourite TV series. It will remind you that movement makes you feel good and more energised.

Failing that, how about combining your movement with TV watching? Emma says: "I find leaving an exercise mat in the living room encourages me to stretch or do strength moves while watching TV." If you can afford it, you could get a static bike or treadmill at home and set it up so you can watch something while exercising.

If you can regularly get to a structured exercise class, go running, cycling or swimming or walk frequently (especially useful if you have a dog) then you will be making great strides in boosting your energy and overall health and wellbeing. But remember, if you are short on time or feeling too fatigued, then anything is better than nothing and will likely still give you an energy boost. 🍌



Incorporate exercises into your other daily activities

You could balance on one leg when brushing your teeth, moving the raised leg up and down behind you to work your glutes and hamstrings. You could do calf raises while waiting in a queue or some squats or lunges in your kitchen while waiting for the kettle to boil.



Set an alarm to remind you to move

This is particularly important if you become engrossed in a task while sat down and don't realise how much time has passed. You could set an alarm on your phone or get a watch to beep on the hour every hour. You don't need to take a big movement break, but could just walk to the kitchen to get a drink or snack or stand up and march on the spot for a couple of minutes.

Start following the Couch to 5k plan

The app is free and very easy to follow. You don't even have to use it to build up to running 5k if you don't want to. You could just keep repeating the early weeks to get some achievable short walk-run intervals into your week while being guided through the steps.

