- Diet / Metabolism



How a good diet can boost your energy

Words: Rob Hobson

Not all fuel is created equal – here's how to eat a diet that will keep you feeling energised long-term

Feeling energised all day isn't just about how much you eat, it's about *what* you eat and how your body uses it. Energy isn't only about calories, but the quality of those calories and the nutrients that come with them, and how they're combined.

Your body's energy systems run on a constant interplay between carbohydrates, fats and protein, with vitamins, minerals and water making the whole process possible. A balanced diet can help maintain steady blood sugar levels, fuel your muscles and brain, and support the tiny powerhouses in your cells called mitochondria that convert food into usable energy.

Energy-boosting foods and how to incorporate them

The body's main fuel source is glucose, but the source of that glucose is important. Complex carbohydrates, found in foods such as whole grains, starchy vegetables,

PRINTED FROM PRESSREADER NOT FOR SALE PERSONAL COPY COMMERCIAL DISTRIBUTION IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED



Food swap: BETTER FUEL FOR LONGER ENERGY

Swap a chocolate bar (fast sugar hit, quick crash) for a banana with peanut butter on a wholegrain cracker. You'll get natural sugars from the banana, plus fibre and complex carbs from the cracker, and slow-releasing fat and protein from the peanut butter, which is a combination that keeps you going for longer.



beans and lentils, release glucose more slowly than refined carbs, avoiding the sudden peaks and dips that can leave you feeling flat. Oats, brown rice, quinoa, wholegrain bread, sweet potatoes and butternut squash are all good examples of these types of carbohydrate.

Legumes, such as chickpeas, kidney beans and lentils, are especially good because they offer complex carbs and protein in the same package, helping to stabilise blood sugar. They also contain a rich source of fibre, which slows digestion and prolongs the release of energy into the bloodstream.

Nuts and seeds are calorie-dense, but balanced as they combine healthy fats, plant protein and fibre, all of which slowly release energy. Almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds, chia and pumpkin seeds are particularly rich in magnesium. This mineral is involved in more than 300 biochemical reactions in the body, many of which are necessary for converting food into usable energy. Low magnesium levels can contribute to fatigue, muscle weakness and even poor sleep quality, which can impact on your daily energy levels. Other good sources include leafy greens, whole grains and beans.

Iron-rich foods are needed for oxygen transport. Without enough iron, your muscles and brain don't get the oxygen they need to function at their best. Good sources include lean red meat, poultry, oily fish, lentils, dark leafy greens and fortified cereals. If you are on a plant-based diet, then pairing iron-rich foods with those rich in vitamin C (tomatoes, peppers, citrus) can improve absorption.

B vitamins also play a central role in energy metabolism by helping enzymes convert the carbohydrates, fats and proteins you eat into ATP. They also support healthy red blood cell production (especially B12), which ensures oxygen is efficiently transported to your tissues and, because they're water-soluble and not stored in large amounts (except B12), you need a steady supply through your diet. Good sources include whole grains, lean meats, fish, eggs, dairy alternatives, leafy greens, beans, nuts and seeds.

Hydration shouldn't be forgotten about either, as even mild dehydration can cause fatigue and reduced concentration. Water is the obvious choice, but herbal teas, milk, soups and water-rich fruit and vegetables (melon, cucumber, oranges) can also help you to meet your needs.

Natural slow-release energy sources

A steady energy supply is not about eating one 'magic' food and more about how you combine foods together. A balanced plate with complex carbs, protein, healthy fats >

NOT FOR SALE PRESSREADER

30 DAYS TO Boost Your Energy

HIGH-ENERGY MEALS

BREAKFAST

Porridge made with unsweetened oat milk, topped with chia seeds, chopped walnuts, and sliced pear. This gives you low-GI carbs, plant omega-3s, fibre, protein and magnesium for steady morning fuel.



LUNCH

Wholemeal wrap filled with houmous, grated carrot, cooked chicken breast, and rocket. Add a side of cherry tomatoes and a handful of almonds. Balanced carbs, fibre, lean protein, healthy fats, and B vitamins help you avoid the mid-afternoon slump.



DINNER

Grilled salmon fillet with quinoa, roasted vegetables (sweet potato, red pepper, and courgette) and a drizzle of olive oil. It's rich in protein, complex carbs, anti-inflammatory fats, and micronutrients such as magnesium and iron, which are ideal for evening recovery and sustained overnight energy.



and colourful vegetables will slow digestion and help prevent energy spikes and dips.

These are some examples of how you can combine ingredients to create slow-energy-releasing meals:

– **Breakfast:** Overnight oats made with milk or a fortified plant drink, chia seeds, berries and a spoon of nut butter. The oats give you complex carbs, the milk adds protein and B vitamins, the chia seeds add fibre and omega-3s, and the berries provide antioxidants.

– **Snack:** An apple with a small handful of walnuts. The natural sugars in the apple provide quick energy, while the fats and protein in the walnuts slow absorption for a longer-lasting effect.

– **Main meal:** Quinoa salad with roasted sweet potato, chickpeas, spinach, olive oil and lemon dressing. You get sustained energy from the carbs, protein for satiety, and plenty of micronutrients to support metabolism.

Protein often gets overlooked in conversations about energy, but it also plays an important role. It slows carbohydrate digestion, supports muscle mass (important for maintaining metabolic rate) and contributes to the production of neurotransmitters, such as dopamine and serotonin, which influence mood and motivation. Aim to include a protein source in every meal from foods such as fish, poultry, eggs, beans, tofu, tempeh or Greek yoghurt.

The glycaemic index (GI) versus the glycaemic load (GL) explained

The glycaemic index (GI) measures how quickly carbohydrate-containing foods raise the level of blood glucose. High-GI foods (such as white bread and sugary drinks) are absorbed quickly, while low-GI foods (such as lentils, quinoa, oats and apples) release glucose more gradually.

However, GI alone doesn't tell us the whole story. The glycaemic load (GL) factors in both the GI and the amount of carbohydrate contained in a standard serving. A good example of this is watermelon, which has a high GI, but a low GL, because it contains relatively little carbohydrate per portion.

Maintaining energy doesn't mean avoiding all high-GI foods, but it helps to balance them with other nutrients. Pairing carbs with protein, healthy

"Think about the combination of foods that you eat, not just the individual items."



fats or fibre can lower the GI of the overall meal:
– White rice alone: high GI, rapid spike.
– White rice with chicken, vegetables and olive oil: slower release, more sustained energy.

This approach reduces the sharp rise and falls in blood sugar that may trigger tiredness and cravings in some people later in the day. It also means you can still enjoy higher-GI foods occasionally without compromising your energy levels, as long as they're part of a balanced meal.

Maintaining good energy levels isn't just about single foods – it's about dietary patterns. Eating a variety of whole, minimally processed foods, staying hydrated, and spacing your meals to suit your activity levels can help you feel consistently alert and focused. In short:
– Build meals around complex carbs, lean proteins and healthy fats.
– Think about the combination of foods that you eat, not just the individual items.
–Include micronutrient-rich vegetables and fruits in every meal.
– Stay hydrated throughout the day.

A good diet works quietly in the background to power your body's systems from muscle contraction to brain function so you can perform at your best without constant peaks and troughs. By making smart, consistent food choices, you give yourself the best chance of steady, sustainable energy throughout the day.

Which supplements are worth it?

Supplements can play a role in supporting energy, but only when there's a genuine need. Many people reach for them as a quick fix for tiredness, but it's important to remember they don't provide energy in the form of calories. Instead, the right supplement may help maintain healthy levels of the vitamins and minerals your body relies on to produce and use energy efficiently.



– **Iron** is a great example. If you're low in iron – especially common in menstruating women, vegetarians and endurance athletes – you may feel tired, short of breath and struggle to focus. If a blood test confirms low iron levels, then a supplement is an important part of the treatment.

– **Vitamin B12** is vital for energy production in your cells and nervous system. It's found mainly in animal or fortified foods, so vegans and some vegetarians should consider supplementing year-round.

– **Vitamin D** deficiency can cause fatigue and muscle weakness. In the UK, everyone is advised to take a 10µg (mcg) supplement from October to March, but if you're persistently tired, it's worth checking your levels.

– Low intakes of **magnesium** are surprisingly common, especially in people who exercise frequently and may lose more magnesium through sweat. While muscle cramps, poor sleep and fatigue can have many causes, inadequate magnesium can contribute to these issues. If your diet is low in magnesium-rich foods, or a blood test shows a deficiency, a supplement may help to restore optimal levels.

– **Creatine** is best known for supporting strength and muscle performance, but research shows that it also plays a role in brain energy. It helps to regenerate ATP, particularly during short bursts of high-intensity activity or when doing demanding mental work. Studies have found that creatine can reduce fatigue and improve performance in repeated sprints, weight training, and even complex problem-solving when sleep deprived.



COMMERCIAL DISTRIBUTION IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED • COPYRIGHT PRESSREADER