

WELLNESS



PETER CROWTHER.

YOUR

TO

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NOT FOR SALE

A drained battery can mess with your day-to-day and make it harder to keep up with your healthy

habits. Here's how to hack your energy levels to stay fully charged.

BY KATE ROCKWOOD

GUIDE TO

having
more
ENERGY

WELLNESS

Fired up.

**Bursting
with energy.**

**Ready to
take on the
world!**

Sound like you? If it doesn't—well, you're pretty normal. Roughly one in five adults worldwide experiences recurring fatigue for up to six months though they have no underlying condition that's causing it, revealed a 2023 meta-analysis of studies on energy levels.

Luckily, you have a lot of control over how much get-up-and-go you have. Lifestyle factors play a major role in whether we're dragging or filled with zip, so a tweak here and there can transform your energy profile while also benefiting your overall health.

If nothing seems to improve your feelings of lethargy, it's probably time to speak to a physician to make sure no underlying issues are to blame. "We all have times when we experience fatigue or low energy," explains Tochi Iroku-Malize, M.D., senior vice president and professor and chair of family medicine at

Northwell Health. "However, it's usually temporary and due to overexertion or not getting enough rest. If fatigue persists or significantly impacts your daily life, it's important to get evaluated." That's because ongoing lethargy can be a symptom of conditions such as heart issues, sleep apnea, and chronic fatigue syndrome, to name a few common ones.

Here's an entire alphabet of expert-backed strategies for avoiding that drained feeling and staying charged and ready to meet whatever comes at you.

Acupuncture.

This staple of Traditional Chinese Medicine is thought to stimulate the nervous system; placing needles strategically on the body could help increase energy levels. For instance, some research suggests that in people with chronic fatigue syndrome (also known as myalgic encephalomyelitis), stacking acupuncture on top of standard treatments may help ease exhaustion and increase verve.



Bedtime.

Bad sleep means low energy, so respect a consistent bedtime with slumber-oriented strategies. "There is strong evidence that good sleep hygiene is vital for brain and metabolic health," says Anthony Pick, M.D., an endocrinologist at Northwestern Medicine. Dim the lights as you wind down toward bedtime, avoid activating media and screens, keep the bedroom at a cool 65°F, block out light and noise, and aim to rise at the same time each day.

DAVID ARKY.



Cut down on sugar.

Metabolism is your body's process of converting food into energy, and high-fructose forms of sugar—common in packaged goods, sugary drinks, and sauces—can sabotage it. Though you may feel a brief uptick after a sweet snack, the "sugar crash" is real: Following that initial surge, you'll feel more wiped out than you did before. If you add sweetener to coffee or tea, try a spoonful less; have fruit instead of cookies; and eat fewer processed foods or reach for ones with little or no added sugar.

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Digital detox.

Looking at screens for too long can cause eyestrain, which tends to make you feel tired. And exposure to blue light at night—the kind emitted by your phone and computer—can disrupt circadian rhythms, making it hard for your body to transition to its natural sleep mode, says Dr. Pick. Instead of sitting on the couch doomscrolling when you have downtime, try filling gaps with activities like stretching, listening to music or a podcast, and reading a book.



Eat more often.

Aim to eat a meal or snack every three to four hours. “This schedule supports stable energy through steady blood sugar release,” explains Jaclyn London, R.D.N., author of *Dressing on the Side (and Other Diet Myths Debunked)*. It also helps prevent overeating, which can leave you feeling tired. Choose snacks that contain protein, fiber, and healthy fat—the “even energy” equation. You could have fruit and nut butter or cheese; veggies and hummus; or a hard-boiled egg with whole-grain crackers.



Fend off stress.

Experiencing stress—and the emotions it causes, like anxiety and discouragement—consumes huge amounts of energy, says Melinda Ring, M.D., executive director of the Osher Center for Integrative Health at Northwestern University. Taming tension can give you a lift by “easing the physical and mental effects of stress that often cause fatigue,” Dr. Ring adds. Techniques like mindfulness and meditation can help, as can talking with a friend or relative, joining a support group, or seeing a therapist.



Gum.

Chomping on sugarless gum may help keep sleepiness at bay while it freshens your breath.

Research suggests that chewing gum can increase alertness and help you focus on tasks. For instance, people who chewed gum while studying a 20-minute physiology lesson outperformed non-gum-chewers, one study found.

GETTY IMAGES.



Head outside.

Ensuring that you get enough sun exposure, especially first thing in the morning, helps your circadian rhythm regulate itself better—that means better sleep and thus better energy when you wake up. Your body clock, a set of internal processes that tells you when it’s time to go to sleep and when it’s time to wake up, takes its cues largely from light levels.

Iron.

If you’re iron deficient, you’re likely acquainted with feeling flattened. Having too little iron in the blood makes it harder for red blood cells to distribute energizing oxygen. Women of childbearing age are especially prone to anemia. If you’re chronically dragging, ask your doctor to test your ferritin levels, Dr. Ring says; your doctor may suggest an iron supplement. Eating iron-rich foods is also smart—these include oysters and mussels, beans, sardines, and dark leafy greens.

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Jog.

Or take a walk. Exercise gets your blood pumping, which helps your heart more efficiently distribute oxygen through your body,

perking you up. It also cues your body to make more energy-inducing neurotransmitters such as dopamine and serotonin, says Elizabeth

Gardner, M.D., a sports medicine surgeon and the head team physician for the Yale athletics department. Physical activity also helps you snooze more soundly.

K

Kickstart the morning with breakfast.

The reasoning is simple: Food is fuel, and if you're heading out with low reserves, you're likely to feel tired sooner. To avoid starting out with an energy deficit, build a breakfast with protein and fiber—Greek yogurt with fruit, eggs with 100% whole-grain toast, and even salad with chicken (if that's your thing) will fit the bill.

L

Laugh.

Endorphins are hormones the brain secretes that make us feel happier and more energized—and as it turns out, laughing is an efficient (and fun) way to generate them. Having a chuckle floods your brain with these feel-good chemicals, improving your mood, while the physical act of laughing increases blood flow, which research shows can also help reduce fatigue.

ANTHONY ZAZZI.

Mocktails.

Drinking too much alcohol can make you dehydrated and less energized. And while booze makes you sleepy, it's a disaster in terms of allowing

you a restful slumber because it disrupts the all-important REM phase of sleep and causes you to awaken more often. When you feel like sipping, get creative with nonalco-

holic concoctions that rely on fizzy water, juice, and botanicals or herbs to stimulate your senses.

N

Napping (but just a little).

Catching a few zzz's when your energy is waning can be a smart decision, but the key is to catnap right. That means for no more than 30 minutes—just enough time to give yourself a little boost to take you through the rest of your day. Napping much longer than that or too late in the day can make it harder to fall asleep at night and affect your energy the next day.



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Opt out.

Don't be afraid to say no or switch up plans. Canceling dinner after a trying workweek or turning down a side project that would overburden your already packed-to-the-gills schedule can help prevent energy

drain. If you're worried about hurt feelings, consider this: Most people don't mind when a friend cancels plans as long as they're honest about the reason, found a 2023 study by Michigan State University.

p

Pillows.

Replace yours at least every two years, as pillows can harbor dust mites, pet dander, dead skin cells, and mold, all of which can trigger allergy symptoms that may lead to poor sleep. Explore what makes a perfect pillow for you—besides varying firmness and stuffing options, there are ones specifically for side sleepers, back sleepers, and those in between.

Quit smoking.

There are plenty of reasons to snuff out your smoking habit, but the effect quitting has on your energy levels may be motivation enough, Dr. Pick says. Nicotine is a stimulant,

which is why you may feel revved up after a few drags; but it also raises your heart rate and blood pressure and stimulates brain activity associated with being awake, so when bedtime

comes your body is still in active mode and dreamland may be difficult to get to. Banishing the butts will help your body better settle into sleep, a surefire recipe for greater energy.

Reduce clutter.

That leaning tower of junk and the pile of unfolded laundry could be zapping your mental energy, which causes your physical energy to go poof too. Multiple studies have found a correlation between a streamlined, serene space and an increased ability to fend off stress and other energy drainers. Tidy up one space at a time to avoid feeling overwhelmed.



Test.

“Low thyroid activity, or hypothyroid, is a well-known hormonal cause of fatigue,” says Dr. Pick. A host of other medical issues also have lethargy or chronic exhaustion as a potential symptom. To check whether an underlying condition could be draining you and, if so, get the right treatment, ask for blood testing at your annual physical. Mention to your doctor that you’ve been lagging lately and ask if they think you should have your thyroid levels (and other blood levels) checked.



Sing.

Research suggests that breaking out in song can supply instant vim, with one study saying that singing can “energize

us and even provide a physical workout.” Listening to favorite tunes also promotes stress relief and is excellent for your mood—two factors that can impact how energetic you feel.

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U

Ultra-processed foods.

Break up with them, as eating ultra-processed foods on the regular could be sapping your energy supply. Items like chips, sodas, and sugary cereals are often filled with added sugar, stabilizers, preservatives, dyes, and artificial flavorings that can make your stamina suffer, research shows. Try to choose foods known for delivering long-term steady energy such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables, nuts, and lean meats and minimally processed plant-based proteins.

MIKE GARTEN.

Vitamins.

Being low in certain vitamins can curtail your energy. For instance, a deficiency in vitamin B₁₂ (an issue that becomes more likely as you get older) has been shown to cause fatigue, and studies suggest that vitamin D deficiency may be connected with fatigue in older adults. Poultry, seafood, eggs, beans, peas, lentils, soy products, nutritional yeast, and nuts and seeds deliver vitamin B₁₂. Vitamin D-rich foods include fatty fish, fortified dairy products, and eggs. If considering a supplement, always talk to your doctor first and ask them for recommendations of reputable third-party-tested brands.



Yoga.

Research suggests that yoga may help improve brain function and increase energy levels; it's thought to have an invigorating effect on mental and physical energy that leads to improved fitness and reduced fatigue, and it may also positively impact your sleep.



Water.

Even mild dehydration can make you feel lethargic, fatigued, and less alert, so make sure you're downing enough H₂O to produce clear or pale yellow urine. Another easy way to guesstimate your hydration needs: Divide your weight in half and aim to drink at least that many ounces daily.



"X-hale."

Mindfully exhaling and inhaling during breathwork or meditation is proven to dial down stress, which can lead to you feeling more vibrant, says Dr. Pick. Look for guided meditations online or through apps like Calm and Headspace. Here's a good breathing technique to try: Imagine tracing a square with your breath as you inhale for a count of four, hold your breath for a count of four, exhale for a count of four, hold your breath for a count of four, and then repeat.

Zone out.

Overstimulation, whether through constantly checking your phone or never making time to be alone, is a common cause of energy drain.

Schedule "me time" into your daily routine so it becomes a priority and doesn't fall by the wayside. And don't stress yourself out by overthinking—whether you spend 10 minutes sipping a cup of tea in solitude, take a 30-minute solo walk, or spend an entire afternoon on your favorite hobby, you'll benefit from a little time just for yourself.