Foods that fight fatigue

Want to boost your energy levels? Experts say when to eat is just as important as what.

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WHEN it comes to women's health, energy levels are among the top concerns, beaten only by mental illness, according to a survey from diet and fitness tracking app MyFitnessPal.



But according to experts, making some judicious changes to what you eat can give you back your verve.

Little and often

Nutritionist Naomi Newman-Beinart says when you eat is as important as what you eat. "Rather than eating three big meals a day, I advise my clients to eat smaller meals more often to help keep a supply of energy.

"Skipping meals can cause a drop in blood sugar, leading to reduced energy, so I recommend eating breakfast within two hours of waking up, then eating every three to four hours. A small snack or a smoothie will do between meals."

Food swaps

Things like switching white bread and pasta for wholemeal grains can help with energy production as wholegrains are a better source of fibre and release glucose into the blood more gradually.

"Start your day with nutritious wholegrain bread or a wrap filled with protein like eggs or tofu, and a healthy fat such as avocado to ensure long-lasting energy," suggests Stephanie Nelson, registered dietitian and MyFitnessPal's inhouse nutrition expert (myfitnesspal.com).

Pack in the protein

"Despite not being our primary source of energy, protein is vital for avoiding fatigue," says Stephanie. "This is because protein can slow the release of carbohydrates into the bloodstream, preventing blood sugar spikes and crashes. Protein serves a variety of purposes in the body, including forming the enzymes necessary for metabolism and repairing tissues, crucial for preserving energy. These processes slow down if you don't get enough protein."

Naomi adds: "This is why I suggest adding protein to smoothies. Not only will this keep you fuller longer, but it slows the absorption of sugar from your smoothie, helping to keep energy levels balanced."

Iron out deficiencies

"Without enough iron in your diet you may struggle with low levels of oxygen in the blood – anaemia – which can lead to lethargy, weakness, tiredness and apathy," says Cheryl Lythgoe, matron at Benenden Health.

“To reduce the risk of this, it’s good to eat plenty of iron-rich foods such as red meat, poultry and fish, tofu, beans, pulses and fortified cereals. Not many people know that mussels provide more iron, gram for gram, than steak. Tea can stop you from absorbing iron from food, so avoid drinking it with your meals.”

Equally, a lack of vitamin B12 can cause issues. “B vitamins – found in eggs, milk, beans, wholegrains, lean meat, and bananas – play a vital role in turning food into energy,” says Naomi. “Vitamin B12 is only found in animal products, so if you are vegan or don’t eat things like liver, beef, sardines, clams and dairy often, take a good quality B complex such as Better You B-complete oral spray (£14.95, hol-landandbarrett. com) to ensure you do not become deficient.”

Fuel up with healthy fats

“Due to the recommendation to eat a low-fat diet for health and weight loss, women frequently don’t consume enough fat,” says Stephanie.

“But good sources of fat can really give you energy and be healthy for your heart. Consider adding additional almonds, olive oil or houmous to your diet as healthy fat sources.”

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Matron Cheryl Lythgoe