

Boost Your Energy

If asked, most of us would probably put 'more energy' on our health wish list. As we get older, it's hard not to hanker after the energy levels that we had as a child. What is energy, where does it go, and how can we get more of it?

What is energy?

In basic biological terms, we get our energy from the food we eat. The food that we take in is stored by our bodies until we need it, then as it's called upon, it's converted by our bodies into energy to 'drive' our bodies and repair them. This chemical reaction is what we usually call the metabolism. In reality, the way that our bodies turn food into energy isn't as straightforward as in versus out, though. Our bodies are delicate instruments, easily upset by stress and what's going on around us.

If you eat well and look after your body, it figures that in most cases, you will be rewarded with more energy – it's a bit like giving your car the right fuel and looking after the engine. Our bodies are pretty resilient and we can survive on very little food – and very poor food too.

In your teens

Teenage energy levels are usually pretty impressive, despite the fact that you're still growing. If your energy levels start to decline, there are a few possible reasons;

Have you been eating properly? It's not a myth that vegetables are good for you. Fuel up properly and you should feel your sparkle coming back. If you're vegetarian, make sure that you are getting enough iron, a mineral that helps your body produce haemoglobin in your blood to carry oxygen to your cells. If you are lacking iron in your diet it can lead to anaemia. Your doctor can diagnose anaemia with a simple blood test, sometimes just a change of diet can really help.

Puberty – have you just started your periods? It's another reason for low iron levels as your body gets used to the routine of a monthly bleed. If you're losing a lot of blood, ask your GP if you need a check for anaemia. He/ she may be able to prescribe iron pills or give you some advice.

Stress – exams and usual teenage stresses can contribute to low energy levels. Introduce some relaxation techniques and keep an eye on what you're eating.

An important tip for teenage girls is to keep up your iron intake. It doesn't have to come from red meat, you can get iron from wholegrain cereals, dried fruit, nuts, pulses and green leafy vegetables too.

Try to eat regularly, and don't skip breakfast. Skipping breakfast doesn't make you thinner, it just makes you hungrier, less able to concentrate and more likely to overeat at lunchtime. Wholegrain cereal, eggs and fruit are all good choices to give you a morning boost of energy.

Harassed Mums

It's hard to keep your energy up while your kids are sapping most of it. You need to stay on top of your game to be able to keep up with little ones – and pregnancy takes care of even more of it. It doesn't take a professional to see why you would be exhausted.

Don't neglect your own wellbeing for the sake of the children. If you're feeling run down, you won't have the strength to deal with the latest catastrophe, so you owe it to yourself and the kids to keep your own energy levels as high as possible.

In addition to making sure that your diet is giving you all the nutrients you need, not skipping meals, and trying to limit the junk, you could consider a good all round multivitamin and mineral supplement. There are some supplements specifically designed for women at different times of their reproductive life.

Busy Working Women

When you're out at work, and life is hectic, it's not easy to find the time to create the perfect diet. You need to make sure that you eat well, and cover foods that include as many antioxidants as possible. Taking a vitamin C and zinc supplement could be beneficial if you're feeling run down - these won't prevent you from getting colds and viruses completely, and once you've caught one they won't help at all, but the combination helps to support your immune system so it might help you to fight some of the bugs off that can attack you when you're feeling frazzled.

The best natural sources of zinc are whole grains, so to get the balance right naturally, a whole grain cereal with some vitamin C rich fruit will help to set you up for a busy day. A supplement can help, but don't rely on it as your only source of these nutrients - busy women need to eat well to function properly.

Mature Women

As you get older, you might feel that your energy levels are deserting you – but it's more important than ever to keep your activity levels up. As they say – use it or lose it!

As women get older, and especially during and after the menopause, we start to lose bone density and this can lead to osteoporosis. Not only does keeping fit and exercising increase energy levels, but regular weight bearing activity like walking is said to help stave off osteoporosis.

There are also supplement formulations especially designed for more mature women, as well as women going through menopause, and you might find that these help.

Stress and energy levels

Stress and depression sap your energy at any age. If you think you may be suffering from depression you need to see your GP. Some of the symptoms of depression include:

- Losing interest in everything
- Inability to cope with everyday things
- Exhaustion
- Restlessness
- Loss of appetite and weight
- Sleep problems.

If you are feeling the effects of a hectic lifestyle, you could consider holistic ways to deal with stress and boost your energy. A yoga or T'ai Chi class relaxes your mind and stretches your muscles, and clinical studies have shown that yogic breathing in particular can be helpful when treating stress, depression and post traumatic stress disorder.

A lack of energy can be caused by many factors, and if you notice a sudden drop in your energy levels, you should seek medical advice.

Summary:

- Eat well – include iron rich foods, and don't skip meals
- Exercise regularly to improve your energy levels
- If you're stressed, try stress relief techniques like yoga
- Don't neglect your own wellbeing – take care of yourself
- If you're concerned about a change in your energy levels, suspect anaemia or depression, see your doctor.

A wide range of women's health resources are available at www.healthywomen.org.uk

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