

# Conquering Fatigue

## Banish Fatigue in Five Easy Steps



**F**atigue is one of the most common health problems reported by people. Next to the common cold, fatigue is the second most common reason why people visit their doctor. Regardless of one's age or fitness level, nearly one in four people report struggling with a lack of energy regularly. Why is fatigue such a common complaint?

### Common Causes of Fatigue

**Nutritional deficiencies** play a major role in fatigue. Our ability to effectively convert calories into active physical and mental energy is very much dependent

on sufficient quantities of certain minerals—especially magnesium—vitamins, and nutrients. Vitamins and minerals play key roles in generating and maintaining energy, yet most people don't get adequate amounts from their diet.

**Insufficient sleep** is another common cause. Most people need about eight hours of sleep; however, everyone is different. The key to knowing whether you are getting enough rest each night is whether you are able to wake up without "help" from your alarm clock. Also, if you find yourself nodding off during the daytime, you need to "hit the hay" earlier than your regular bedtime.

**Stress contributes to** fatigue. Physical stress, specifically overexertion on a regular basis, can cause fatigue because it depletes important electrolytes—minerals that conduct energy—such as magnesium and potassium from our body. Emotional stress, such as family pressures, deadlines at work, etc., are a factor. Psychological stressors can overwhelm us, leaving one feeling too tired to exercise.

**Chronic/underlying infection or lowered immunity** is another factor. Fatigue is common for those battling an underlying infection or post-surgery. In either situation, the body is expending large amounts of energy to combat infection and speed healing.

**Hormonal disturbances** can affect energy levels. Slight fluctuations of thyroid or adrenal hormone, even estrogen and progesterone, have dramatic effects on our body and can significantly impair our well being. If you experience chronic fatigue for weeks and nothing seems to help, visit a doctor who can conduct a physical exam and test your hormone levels.

## Instant Energy Boosters

### 1 Eat Right

Now, more than at any other point in history, Americans have a plentiful abundance of food to choose from. However, despite the fact that most people consume plenty of what dietitians call energy, also known as calories, fatigue continues to be a common complaint. Why?

The Western diet is made up of processed foods that are rich in fat, sugar, and calories, but low in essential minerals and vitamins. To offer an analogy, the human body is similar to an engine, and calories are like fuel. The average person's problem with energy is that rather than having run out of gas (*i.e.*, calories), instead, we have flooded the engine. In other words, despite the fact that most people consume plenty of calories, most of us feel like we don't have enough energy to make it through the day.

Eating a wide array of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, and adding lean protein to every meal and snack will provide you with the right kind of energy. Unlike refined foods like sugary-coated breakfast cereals that provide a quick energy boost, whole foods provide your body's engine with a cleaner, longer-burning source of fuel. By

emphasizing whole foods in your diet, your energy levels are less likely to nosedive an hour after your meal and you won't crave junk food. In addition, you will be nourishing your body with the right balance of nutrients to support good health.

### 2 Say No to Stimulants

Stimulants such as coffee, tea, tobacco, and, yes, even sugar contribute to fatigue. All of these substances make us feel good in the short term. We're able to juggle our responsibilities, get more work done, and meet pressing deadlines, but, over time, we become addicted to these substances and need more and more to get that same energetic feeling as before.

Another reason to avoid sugar, coffee, and tea is that these substances interfere with our body's absorption of important minerals and vitamins. High amounts of sugar have been shown to deplete our body of magnesium, an essential mineral that participates in nearly every form of energy production in the body. Coffee and tea can interfere with the absorption of calcium, which is important for strong, healthy bones.

### 3 Get Moving

Exercise is one of the most important steps one can take to boost sagging energy levels. Exercise has an energizing, therapeutic effect on the body. It improves circulation, delivering oxygen to the muscles throughout our body. It also increases weight loss and improves heart function, stamina, strength, and immune system function.

Health experts recommend 20 minutes a day, five days a week, but if the thought of exercise leaves you feeling breathless,

start out slow. Take a walk with a loved one or friend, go for a bike ride, or sign up for a water-exercise class.

#### **4 Drink More Water**

More than 70 percent of our body is made up of water. Life, itself, depends on an adequate intake of water. Water is also a necessary component of energy production and utilization, participating in our body's metabolism of carbohydrates, protein, and fats. Without enough water, the kidneys don't work and our liver is unable to metabolize fat, which results in more fat that is stored in the body rather than being burned for energy.

Sip on a glass of water throughout the day, and drink water if you feel hungry between meals. If you still feel hungry after a glass of water, reach for a healthy snack.

#### **5 Try a Nutritional Supplement**

Being able to effectively turn calories consumed into active mental and physical energy is very much dependent on sufficient quantities of minerals, vitamins, and nutrients. The most typical foods in the modern diet provide dense calories and very little, if any, nutrients.

To support vital energy, begin by taking a daily multi-vitamin and mineral supplement. A multiple will provide the essential building blocks to support optimal health. In addition, consider supplementing with other nutrients

including magnesium, B<sub>6</sub>, and antioxidants (alpha-lipoic acid, vitamins C and E), which play key roles in generating and maintaining energy. According to Dr. Carolyn Dean, a physician, health expert and author, magnesium is one of *the* most important nutrients for fatigue. Magnesium, she states, assists in the production of adenosine triphosphate or ATP, which are the "energy packets" our body uses to produce and store energy. Without magnesium, life ceases to exist.

Besides providing nourishment for your body, minerals and vitamins will also provide key nutrients to help your body make the most of the energy you consume from foods. The chart below lists important nutrients that are helpful for fighting fatigue.

No one should live with fatigue. By taking care of your body and eating a nutritious diet, obtaining adequate rest, avoiding stress and stimulants, and nourishing your body with essential, revitalizing minerals and vitamins, these steps can help break the cycle of fatigue so that you can enjoy life to its fullest. ■

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#### **Selected Sources**

*Complete Guide to Vitamins, Minerals & Supplements* by H. Winter Griffith, MD (Fisher Books, ©1988)

*The Miracle of Magnesium* by Carolyn Dean, MD, ND (Ballantine Books, ©2003)

## Vital Nutrients for Energy

Here are some important nutrients helpful for fighting fatigue. Use as directed. If you are currently under a doctor's supervision for a serious medical condition or are currently taking any prescription medications, be sure to discuss these dietary supplements with your healthcare provider.

### Mineral/Vitamin

### Action

<b>Magnesium</b> .....	Aids function of nerves and muscles, including regulation of normal heart rhythm and conduction of nerve impulses. Our body uses magnesium to produce ATP, which is the energy source our muscles use.
<b>Zinc</b> .....	Important for protein, fat, and carbohydrate metabolism. Zinc also helps insulin function. Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas that helps glucose enter the cells where it's used for energy. Zinc assists in insulin production and it protects cells' insulin receptors, helping insulin work more effectively.
<b>Chromium</b> .....	Promotes glucose metabolism and helps insulin regulate blood sugar.
<b>Vitamin B<sub>6</sub></b> .....	Acts as a co-enzyme for metabolic function affecting protein, carbohydrate, and fat utilization. It also helps carry oxygen to tissues and cells and increases the function of the energy cycle.
<b>Vitamins C and E</b> .....	Function as crucial co-factors for other nutrients. Vitamin C, for instance, works with L-carnitine, which transports fat into the mitochondria of our cells where it's burned for energy. In addition, both nutrients protect cells and tissues from oxidation caused by free radicals in the body.
<b>Alpha-Lipoic Acid</b> .....	Vital for numerous energy-producing reactions in the body. Studies show it improves insulin sensitivity. It's also an antioxidant that can protect the body from damage caused by free radicals.



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