

Take action today

In slow-mo? 10 ways to pick up your pace

You can blame some of your energy crisis on a serious lack of shut-eye, but there may be other reasons you're slogging along like a turtle. Find out what's fueling your fatigue and how to light a fire under your butt. **By Rachel Grumman**

Energy sapper: your breakfast menu

Missing a morning meal slows metabolism and depletes your body of the fuel it needs to function optimally, explains SELF contributing editor Joy Bauer, R.D. But what you eat matters as much as the fact that you eat something. Carbohydrates—as in a breakfast muffin or pastry—signal the brain to release serotonin, a neurotransmitter that brings on calm when you most want to be up and at 'em. Also, your body digests simple, unrefined carbs quickly, sending blood sugar soaring and then plummeting, resulting in an energy crash, Bauer says.

FATIGUE FIGHTER Start each day with a breakfast that contains at least 5 grams of protein. This nutrient activates the production of norepinephrine, a neurochemical that increases heart rate and alertness. Unlike carbs, protein digests slowly so blood sugar and energy levels stay stable. Some tasty recipes: a cup of cereal (with 3 g or more of fiber, no more than 120 calories per serving) topped with skim milk, ½ cup of blueberries and 1 tablespoon of chopped walnuts (10 g of protein per serving), or an omelet made with 4 egg whites, ½ cup of chopped broccoli, ¼ cup of chopped onion and 1 ounce of lowfat shredded cheese (22 g of protein per serving).

Energy sapper: your outfit

Those killer heels and pencil skirts may look polished and professional, but if you're sacrificing comfort for fashion, they can also turn you into the office sloth. Workers took an average of 491 fewer steps on days they wore more formal business attire compared with dress-down days, according to research commissioned by the American Council on Exercise in San Diego. And using less energy leads to *having* less energy, says Cedric Bryant, Ph.D., chief science officer with ACE: "Sitting at your desk all day slows circulation, so less energizing oxygen is delivered to cells throughout your body."

FATIGUE FIGHTER Wear clothes that allow for movement and cushy

footwear instead of uncomfortable heels to the office so you'll be more likely to walk around. If you can't part with your stilettos, keep them on at work, then slip into flats or low-heeled shoes for a lunch-break walk outdoors and your commute. Today, companies such as Cole Haan and Aerosoles offer fashionable flats and kitten heels that won't make you look like a secretary circa 1987.

Energy sapper: your caffeine habit

Going on a Starbucks run at 3 P.M. can help carry you through the rest of your day—and unfortunately, well into the night. "Caffeine can stay in your system for up to eight hours or even more, so drinking coffee too late in the afternoon may disrupt your slumber, stealing the rest you need for next-day stamina," Bauer says.

FATIGUE FIGHTER Limit coffee consumption to two or three 8-ounce cups a day (about 200 or 300 milligrams of caffeine) to avoid overload and subsequent headaches and jitters, and cut out the upper about eight hours before bedtime. Still sleepy in the afternoon? Have an energizing high-protein snack; a handful of almonds will do it.

Energy sapper: your worrying

Credit card debt, a micromanaging boss—long-term stressors such as these can leave you spent. "Chronic stress increases heart rate and blood pressure, making your body work overtime," explains Nieca Goldberg, M.D., director of the New York University Langone Medical Center Women's Heart Program in New York City. "When you're on edge, you also tend to tighten your muscles, which sets you up for aches and fatigue." What's more, worriers often take shallow breaths, so they don't take in enough oxygen, Dr. Goldberg says. "You're essentially hyperventilating and building up carbon dioxide in your blood, a waste product that can make you feel tired and dizzy."

FATIGUE FIGHTER When anxiety strikes, take three slow, deep breaths to give your body a big dose of energizing



Aim for seven to eight hours of sleep per night.

oxygen while slowing down a rapid heart rate. Then, as soon as you have a few minutes of downtime, do something distracting that feels good, like talking to a friend or watching a funny movie. And always pay attention to how you talk about things, which has a direct impact on your mind-set, explains Linda Sapadin, Ph.D., author of *Master Your Fears* (Wiley). "Worriers tend to say 'I'll never' or 'I can't,' such as 'I can't get out of debt,'" Sapadin says. She suggests countering negative sentiments by tacking on a positive phrase at the end. For instance, say, "I can't get out of debt right now, but I *can* research credit cards with better interest rates."

Energy sapper: your messy desk

Digging through piles of unorganized paperwork is a time and energy stealer in and of itself, but merely the sight of those stacks

can stress you out, decrease efficiency and drain your brain, says Carol Landau, Ph.D., clinical professor of psychiatry and medicine at Brown Medical School in Providence, Rhode Island.

FATIGUE FIGHTER "A little disarray is OK, but in general, your desk should hold only items that you use very frequently—your computer or stapler—and the paperwork you're working on that day," notes Laura Stack, author of *The Exhaustion Cure* (Random House). Nonessential items—a labeler and a three-hole punch—can go in a drawer. To keep your desk clear, spend five minutes at the end of each day putting documents you're working on in a neat pile and filing away the rest. "Prepping your workspace for the next day gives you a sense of completion that instantly reduces stress, which is crippling to your energy levels," says Steven Berglas, Ph.D., author of *Reclaiming the Fire: How Successful People Overcome Burnout* (Random House).

Energy sapper: your Saturday sleep-ins

"Bingeing on sleep on weekends to catch up on missed zzz's throws off your circadian rhythm, your body's 24-hour clock that plays a key role in sleep and wakefulness," says Amy Wolfson, Ph.D., author of *The Woman's Book of Sleep* (New Harbinger Publications). Sleeping in—and hitting the hay that night later than usual as a result—also makes it hard to readjust to your workweek routine, so you start Mondays in a fog.

FATIGUE FIGHTER No one's saying you can't go out and have a good time, but strive to get up within the same 60-minute range both days: Oversleeping by more than one hour significantly disrupts your body clock. Still wake up with a case of the groggies? Open your bedroom shades as soon as your alarm goes off. The sunlight sends a signal to your brain that it's time to get up.

Energy sapper: your lack of vitamin C

About 30 percent of women don't get enough vitamin C, and too-low levels can zap your energy. That's because vitamin C helps produce carnitine, a molecule that shuttles fatty acids into cells where they're burned for energy, says Carol Johnston, Ph.D., professor of nutrition at Arizona State University at Mesa. "Lack of carnitine forces the body to use carbs or protein for energy instead. That can cause your body to produce lactic acid, a waste product that builds up in tissue and fatigues muscles."

“Low levels of vitamin C can zap your energy and may lead to muscle fatigue.”

FATIGUE FIGHTER Aim to get the recommended daily allowance of 75 mg of C daily by noshing on naturally rich sources such as an orange or a kiwifruit (both have about 70 mg per fruit), broccoli (1 cup chopped: 74 mg) or strawberries (1 cup: 89 mg).

Energy sapper: your stuck-in-a-rut routine

Grandma was right: Variety is the spice of life. "We all crave diversity and challenge," Berglas says. "When there's no challenge in completing a task, you go on autopilot—it's mind-numbing."

FATIGUE FIGHTER If job monotony is dragging you down, ask your boss for more or different responsibilities, or have lunch with someone in another department to find out if her type of job is something you'd like to explore, Berglas suggests. Blasé about your daily regimen? Simple change-ups

can deliver some rut-busting benefits. For instance, find an alternate route home (and stop at a park or shop that grabs your eye along the way); sign up for a language, pottery or photography class to get your brain chomping on something new; or trade the treadmill for a fun circuit training class.

Energy sapper: your heavy flow

Heavy periods can deplete your iron levels and even cause anemia, a condition in which there aren't enough healthy red blood cells to carry adequate energizing oxygen to tissue, according to Rajiv K. Pruthi, M.D., a hematology consultant at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

FATIGUE FIGHTER If you're feeling chronically wiped out despite getting ample shut-eye, see your doc. She may perform a blood test to check your iron and red cell count and, if they're low, advise taking iron supplements to boost your stores. (Don't take supplements without your M.D.'s knowledge because iron overload can be toxic.) Eating more iron-rich foods, such as lean red meat and poultry, beans, lentils and spinach, can also help shore you up.

Energy sapper: your sluggish thyroid

Found at the base of the throat, this gland secretes hormones that help control metabolism, heart rate and more. "The less active your thyroid is in producing hormones, the slower your metabolism and the less energy you have," says Stephen Richardson, M.D., an endocrinologist at NYU Langone Medical Center. Other telltale signs of an underactive thyroid include constipation, menstrual irregularities and dry skin, hair and nails.

FATIGUE FIGHTER A blood test can reveal whether your levels of thyroid-stimulating hormone are high—a sign that the thyroid isn't working up to speed. If they are, your M.D. can help pinpoint and treat whatever is elevating them; a viral infection or Hashimoto's thyroiditis (an autoimmune disease) are potential culprits. If your gland can't do its job, you may need to take a daily synthetic thyroid hormone pill. Fortunately, once those hormones are back in balance, your lethargy will disappear. In the meantime, try relaxation exercises (deep breathing or yoga). "If you have a thyroid problem, stress might add to the drain on your energy levels," Dr. Richardson says. That's one more good excuse to take it easy—and save your energy for something fun. ■