

Home > Articles > Boost your energy - all day long!

HEALTHY EATING

Boost your energy - all day long!



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Ever felt like you're running on empty as the day wears on? Or feel sluggish and lethargic after eating? Or maybe you've given in to those persistent cravings, only to munch on some chocolate or bread – then feel hungry and tired again soon after! It could be a blood sugar imbalance that's causing your energy levels to crash (and your mood with it) so here's how to stop the slump – and keep your metabolism steady and stable throughout the day.

But first – what is blood sugar imbalance?

Well, when you eat a meal or snack, carbohydrates in the food you're munching on start to be broken down into glucose and this is then absorbed into the bloodstream to be used as fuel for your body. Glucose is the name given to sugar in the blood and acts as the main source of fuel for the body. Consequently, after eating, the levels of glucose (or sugar) in your blood start to rise. Because the body likes to keep blood sugar within a tight range, it releases insulin to bring the level back down, as a response to this rise. Glucose can be taken up into the body's cells and used for energy production while any excess is then stored in the fat, liver and muscle tissues.

A diet high in starchy, sugary foods can really impact blood sugar levels. So, for example, eating foods such as white bread or pasta, sugary cakes, chocolate and even caffeine can affect the body's ability to maintain blood sugar levels, because these foods result in lots of glucose being released into the blood quickly, which then triggers the release of insulin to bring the levels back into range, as we discussed earlier. Sometimes the body 'overshoots', causing levels to drop too much and with it, comes energy slumps, cravings, feelings of tiredness and low mood throughout the day. This can then cause us to reach for more coffee, chocolate or carbs to keep going, creating a vicious circle - an initial surge of energy is followed by a crash which is then followed by cravings and snacking.

Dehydration and intense exercise also cause blood sugar to increase, as can lack of sleep, a hot day or even an extra coffee. Hormonal fluctuations brought on by illness, emotional upset or the age and stage we're at in life can also affect how well we can regulate these levels.

Having persistently raised blood glucose levels over a long period of time can lead to insulin resistance. When this occurs, the cells of the body can't use or store glucose, causing high levels to build up in the blood and the insulin to have less and less effect over time. Eventually, this can lead to metabolic syndrome and type 2 diabetes. Obesity, especially around the middle, inability to lose weight and inflammation can be signs of insulin resistance.

But the great news is that it is possible to maintain a healthy blood sugar balance through diet and lifestyle. So start today and step off the blood sugar rollercoaster.

10 tips to maintain a healthy blood sugar balance

- Firstly, it's important to increase the fibre in your diet – vegetables, legumes such as chickpeas and beans all release their energy slowly. Soluble fibre from oats combined with protein from nuts or nut butter can make a healthy breakfast that keeps you going all morning. Reducing carbohydrate intake to just a couple of small portions per day and making sure these are wholegrain, 'full of fibre' varieties can also help.
- Choose veggies as your source of carbs wherever possible (courgetti instead of spaghetti, anyone?) and always team any carbs you do eat with a protein source and beneficial fats such as olives, olive oil, avocados, nuts, seeds or oily fish to slow down the release of glucose into the bloodstream.
- It's especially important to eat protein for breakfast, so choose eggs, houmous or natural yogurt for example (not necessarily all together!) rather than cereal or toast and jam, for example, as the protein will keep you feeling much fuller for longer and you'll be less likely to start snacking on biscuits mid-morning.
- Eating foods rich in Chromium (nuts, egg yolks, green beans and broccoli) and Magnesium (dark, leafy green veggies, fish, bananas and avocados) can also help as both may contribute to healthy blood sugar control. Try dressing salads with apple cider vinegar and flax, avocado or olive oils – this can help reduce cravings and energy slumps and improve the way your body responds to sugars and starchy foods, by slowing down their absorption.
- Cinnamon also slows the absorption of carbs after a meal, which in turn prevents blood sugar spikes after eating. Add a teaspoon per day to yoghurt or nut milk drinks. Ginger and nutmeg work in a similar way.
- Don't forget to get plenty of sleep – lack of quality shut-eye can increase appetite the next day, resulting in cravings for sugary, carb-rich food and leading to weight gain. Or try chewing fenugreek seeds after a meal as they are thought to improve glucose tolerance.
- It's also essential to exercise regularly – the muscles in your body can use up

the glucose efficiently, preventing those highs and lows.

- Drink six to eight glasses of water per day to stay well hydrated and prevent rising sugar levels in the blood.
- Eating dinner earlier in the evening and then having breakfast later is also thought to be beneficial, by creating a longer 'fasting' window to ensure more efficient digestion and breakdown of foods, and also to give the body a chance to rest properly overnight, rather than working away digesting dinner while you sleep!
- Hormonal and gut flora imbalances or 'leaky gut' syndrome can all affect digestion and absorption of foods which can lead to nutrient deficiencies, and make it difficult to control and regulate appetite and blood sugar. In these instances, supplements can be utilised to help support the body's natural processes. However, it's essential to always see a qualified nutritional practitioner to discuss this.

Contact a nutritional practitioner to support you with your blood sugar rollercoaster. They can also create a personalised nutrition programme to help support your well-being goals, whilst ensuring you don't feel hungry or deprived throughout the process!

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