

7 Surprising Ways to Boost Your Energy

Woodson Merrell, MD

As many as one of every five American adults has fatigue that is severe enough to interfere with daily activities.

Problem: Most of these people take the wrong steps when trying to regain their energy. For example, drinking popular "energy" drinks, which contain substantial amounts of caffeine, merely masks fatigue by stimulating the nervous system for only a few hours.

Solution: Try safe and effective natural strategies that help produce *sustained* energy.

Important: If you suffer from fatigue that interferes with your ability to complete your daily activities, see a doctor to rule out an undiagnosed condition -- such as anemia, heart disease or hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid). If your doctor finds no underlying cause, try the remedies below for several days. If you still feel fatigued, consider seeking additional medical guidance.

What you need to know about overcoming fatigue...

YOUR BODY'S ENERGY SOURCE

Your body's real energy source is a molecule called *adenosine triphosphate* (ATP), which is constantly being produced by the thousands of *mitochondria* (tiny energy factories) in each of your body's cells. An important way to truly boost your energy is to properly nourish these ATP-producing powerhouses, while also reducing your body's level of stress chemicals -- one of the biggest energy drains in modern life.

FOR MORE "GET UP AND GO"

For starters, try well-known strategies, such as getting enough sleep, eating healthfully, exercising regularly and lowering stress. Then supplement these strategies with the following steps -- any one of them may give you an immediate boost. After seven days, you'll likely begin to feel an even greater, more sustained level of energy...

1. Switch from coffee to green tea. Most people enjoy a caffeinated beverage, such as coffee, in the morning for a quick energy boost. However, this approach can be counterproductive. Coffee, which contains an average of 120 mg of caffeine per cup, hypes up your nervous system temporarily, which can lead to an energy slump within hours.

For this reason, people who typically drink coffee or another highly caffeinated beverage in the morning should consider switching to green tea. In addition to having less caffeine (just 10 mg to 30 mg per cup), green tea also contains *theanine*, a calming amino acid that moderates caffeine's nervous system-stimulating effect for a gentle, steady boost.

Helpful: If you suffer withdrawal symptoms, such as headaches, when giving up coffee, cut consumption of your usual morning drink in half and substitute green tea for each cup given up. Within a short time, you'll be off coffee altogether.

If you find green tea to be bitter, try flavored green teas, such as peppermint or peach. Ultimately, it's best to limit consumption of any caffeinated drink to two cups daily.

Also important: Stay hydrated. Without proper hydration, the body cannot supply nutrients to its energy-producing cells.

To avoid a mid-afternoon slump: Drink five to six cups of fluids (preferably water, juice, herbal tea or decaffeinated coffee) before 3 pm -- this ensures that you're hydrated during what are hours of peak activity for most people.

2. Eliminate wheat from your diet. About 1% of Americans have celiac disease (a condition that leads to digestive problems when gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye, is consumed). However, there's a far more common condition, known as wheat intolerance, which causes a myriad of symptoms when wheat -- but not barley or rye -- is consumed. About half of my patients have wheat intolerance by age 40, often leading to fatigue, and also to headache, indigestion and joint pain.

Likely reason: Modern wheat, which was one of the earliest foods to be grown in hybrid forms, contains newer proteins thought to trigger inflammatory responses with repeated exposure. Brown rice, quinoa and amaranth make great substitutes.

3. Take ayurvedic ashwaganda daily. Available in supplement form, this herb is an *adaptogen* that increases energy by reducing the effects of stress.

Ashwaganda stimulates energy production while calming the nervous system... helps the body more efficiently metabolize the stress hormone *cortisol*... and strengthens the immune system.

Good product: The "sensoril" variety of ashwaganda, such as that from Jarrow Formulas (310-204-6936, www.Jarrow.com)... and Natural Factors Nutritional Products, Inc. (800-322-8704, www.NaturalFactors.com). *Typical dose:* 250 mg, twice daily. Consult your doctor before taking this or any other herbal remedy.

4. Take a sauna. Research suggests that saunas (steam or dry) have the potential to eliminate toxins from your body, including mercury, dioxin and PCBs -- all commonly found in our environment and known to wreak havoc on one's energy production system.

However, check with your doctor first -- saunas are not recommended for some people, including those with heart disease, pregnant women or individuals taking certain medications, such as those prescribed for high blood pressure or depression.

5. Undergo a relaxation-oriented acupuncture session. While most people associate acupuncture with its well-known ability to decrease pain and help heal inflamed tissue, it's also great for reducing stress and boosting energy.

One 20-minute treatment is often enough to help balance the nervous system and neurotransmitters (such as endorphins and serotonin) and enhance energy levels for up to

two days. To find an acupuncturist, contact the American Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (866-455-7999, www.aaaomonline.org).

6. Do an "energy ball" exercise several times daily. This two-minute, beginner-level exercise is derived from the ancient Chinese system of energy movement known as Qi gong. Similar to other martial arts derivatives, such as tai chi, Qi gong connects energy circuits through mind, muscle and breath control.

What to do: Stand with your knees slightly bent, your buttocks tucked under and arms at your sides. While taking slow, deep abdominal breaths, allow your arms to slowly float up, shoulder-width apart, while your palms roll inward then face you (as if holding a giant ball of energy). Bend your arms as if bringing the ball closer to you, then rotate your wrists so that your palms face outward.

"Push" the ball away from you until your arms are straight while stepping forward onto your left foot. Let your arms float apart to form the top of a "T," then bring your arms gently down to your sides as you move your left foot back to its starting position.

Finally, "lift" the ball overhead and let it go, then let your arms float back down to your sides, palms facing inward. Repeat, stepping forward with your right foot.

7. Use a fatigue-fighting stress reducer each day. The following products are great for calming the nervous system so that less energy is wasted during the day. Each is available at health-food stores.

■ **Bach Rescue Remedy** (an extract that contains 38 flower essences) -- use as directed on the label.

■ **L-theanine amino acid** -- take 500-mg capsules, twice daily.

■ **Lavender essential oil** -- massage into the skin or use as aroma therapy in a diffuser.

Try one of these stress reducers and see how it works for you. As with all supplements and herbal remedies, first check with your doctor.