

## **Energize Your Workouts**

Energize and Motivate your body

*By Liz Applegate*

A number of factors can conspire to make you find an excuse to not exercise. Physical hunger is the most common culprit, which is why I suggest to fitness enthusiasts that they snack on mini meals every few hours rather than eat two or three large meals a day. Other factors that mainly affect your brain's energy can cause a dip in motivation as well.

Here are some food tips and strategies to keep your energy up and your motivation in motion.

### **Make Breakfast Happen**

Skipping breakfast, the most important meal of the day, can leave you feeling muddleheaded both at work and during your workout. Many studies on children have shown that when they miss breakfast, they falter in reading, memory, and other cognitive skills. It appears that the brain is sensitive to short-term deficits in fuel and nutrient supply.

Going all night without food and then skipping breakfast may cause your blood sugar levels to dip, which can bring on light-headedness. And since sugar in the form of glucose is your brain's primary fuel source, it's no wonder that your memory and other thinking powers go downhill when you're running on empty. Ready-to-eat breakfast cereal, fruit, and milk make for a great start. Or try unconventional breakfast items such as leftover pizza or a casserole. If you're in a hurry, take along a container of yogurt, a piece of fruit, and a whole grain roll, or try a ready-made pita wrap (available in your supermarket's deli section). Or throw fresh berries, low-fat ice cream, and milk in a blender, then grab a cup of this super fruit smoothie in one hand, your briefcase in the other, and go.

### **Wake Up With Water**

A cold splash of water in the face has always been a reliable wake-up call, but drinking water can energize and refresh you even more. Between 55 and 60 percent of your body is composed of water, most of it residing in your cells, where it allows for essential chemical reactions like the breakdown of carbohydrates for brain fuel. In fact, your brain is more than 70 percent water by weight, and if this percentage dips below a critical level, you'll feel listless, dull, and headachy.

Brain dehydration can easily happen even without the added stress of exercise. Dry indoor air causes fluid loss that you may not be aware of; combined with too little water intake and too many caffeinated beverages, this gradual dehydration can leave you with a brain-drain headache by late afternoon.

Keep yourself energized by starting off your morning with an 8-ounce glass of plain water before your morning coffee. Keep a bottle of water handy, drinking 1 to 2 quarts throughout the day. According to the USDA, most people in the United States drink only one-quarter of their fluid needs as plain water; they get the rest from coffee, soda, and food. For a clear head, reach for the clear stuff.

### **Snack on Raisins**

Raisins (along with apples, nuts, and parsley) are a great source of the mineral boron, which plays a role in brain function, perhaps combating drowsiness. In a series of studies performed by the USDA, healthy men and women ate diets low in boron for several weeks. Another group ate the same foods but took a boron supplement. Both groups took a battery of tests that assessed brain functions such as brain wave activity and cognitive skills, including memory, attention, and manual dexterity.

Compared with those in the supplement group, the subjects on the boron-deficient diet showed slowed brain activity, indicating drowsiness. Researchers also noted deterioration in cognitive skills among the low-boron group. The USDA researchers gave the study subjects 3 to 4 milligrams of boron, a dosage equivalent to that found in about 3 ounces of raisins and 1 ounce of almonds.

Toss a few raisins and nuts into your cereal and salads and keep some snack-size boxes or packets in your desk for afternoon grazing.

### **Munch on Brazil Nuts and Tuna**

Brazil nuts and tuna are two of the best food sources of selenium, a mineral that not only serves as an antioxidant but also may boost mood, lift spirits, and contribute to feelings of clearheadedness. USDA researchers tracked the effects of varying selenium intakes on men's mood profiles for 15 weeks. Half of the men in the study consumed 40 percent of the recommended daily selenium requirement, while the other half took in about 350 percent.

When researchers tested the moods of both groups, the high-selenium group felt more elated than depressed, more energetic than tired, more clearheaded than confused, and more confident than unsure.

But before you rush out and buy a selenium supplement, be aware that this mineral is highly toxic in large doses. Stick to no more than 400 micrograms, or five to seven times the daily requirement (which is 55 micrograms), and talk to your doctor before supplementing with that amount. Better yet, concentrate on getting selenium in your diet. In addition to tuna and nuts, other good food sources include chicken, turkey, lean beef, and whole grain bread and cereals.

### **Lighten Up at Lunch**

You probably know from experience that loading up at lunch can leave you feeling sleepy in the afternoon. That's because food in your digestive tract diverts blood away from other parts of your body, leaving you with that sluggish feeling. Studies show that big meals (1,000 calories or more) at midday cause more drowsiness than lunches half that size. If you feel sleepy following even a light lunch, try adding some protein the next day.

### **Fill Up on Fiber**

If you feel de-energized and hungry when your meal wears off, try adding some fiber to your fare. Pectin, a type of water-soluble fiber found in fruits such as apples and oranges, has been shown to help people feel full longer by delaying emptying of the stomach. When people swallowed a 5-gram dose of pectin (extracted from apples) with their meal, they felt full for up to 4 hours. An added benefit is that pectin also helps lower blood cholesterol levels.

### **Snack Intelligently**

If you're just plain tired, eating a small snack can perk you up. Keep these snacks high in nutrient-packed, carbohydrate-rich foods and light on calories (stay under 200). If the snack is crunchy, really hot, or really cold, it will help wake up your senses. Here are some healthful examples:

# One frozen fruit bar

# 8 ounces of drinkable fruit-flavored yogurt mixed with 4 ounces of club soda

# One ready-to-eat cereal bar like Nutri-Grain tossed in the microwave for less than a minute and then spread with 1 tablespoon fat-free cream cheese

# One sorbet "sandwich" (3 tablespoons strawberry sorbet wedged between two caramel corn rice cakes)

# One small package of precut veggies with reduced-fat dip

### **Avoid a Java Jag**

Drinking a cup or two of coffee improves feelings of alertness and clearheadedness and may even bolster your performance on monotonous tasks such as typing or filing. But moderate use of this pick-me-up can easily brew into a caffeine habit that may actually zap your energy and cause fatigue. People who perpetually have a cup of coffee, tea, or cola in their hands have developed a dependency. Without a steady allotment of the stimulant throughout the day, they feel tired, irritable, and even headachy (a symptom of withdrawal). In short, they're caffeine junkies.

If you view coffee or other caffeinated beverages as a life source without which you can't function, try phasing caffeine out a little at a time to regain your own natural energy. Start your "detox" by cutting one-fifth of your typical daily caffeine intake for a few weeks. You may experience fatigue or headaches for a day or two as your body goes through withdrawal. When you've adjusted to this amount, continue gradually cutting back. Once you're down to a cup or two in the morning, you can decide whether you want to eliminate caffeine altogether.

### **Ditch the Diet**

According to research, people who cut calories to slim down perform poorly on tests of memory and mental processing. One study compared the mental performances of people on weight-reducing diets to the performances of those who weren't dieting. The researchers likened the slowed mental performance seen in dieters to being intoxicated by alcohol.

While some researchers argue that poor mental performance stems from an inadequate flow of energy to the brain, the researchers who did the study theorize that the results of the study reflect dieters' feelings of anxiety. When dieting, most people start obsessing over the foods that they are trying not to eat as well as worrying about the success of their dieting efforts. This type of distraction affects mental processing capacity. The effects were more serious in dieters who weren't losing weight than in those who were, supporting the theory that anxiety may play a role in undermining mental performance.

If you're limiting your calories to lose weight, avoid radical dieting, which is sure to leave you feeling drained. The best route to weight loss is to boost your activity level to burn more calories while simultaneously making small adjustments to your eating habits. You have better things to do than worry about your next meal.