

Editors' Choice Article

# Energizing Yourself

Powering Through Your Day

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Imagine that it's 2:30 p.m., and that you've run into a brick wall at work. You can barely keep your eyes open, and you're struggling to stay focused. All you want to do is take a nap.

At times like this, you may make poor decisions or feel irritable, or you may struggle to deliver high-quality work or meet deadlines. And you may lack the energy to push ahead with new initiatives.

Let's face it: to do our best, we need to be energized throughout the day!



*A glass of water can help you to regain your energy.*  
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In this article, we'll look at what lies behind low energy levels, and we'll explore what you can do to boost them.

## What Causes Low Energy?

There are many reasons why your energy levels may be low. For example, this could be caused by:

- Lack of sleep.
- Poor diet.
- Iron or vitamin deficiencies.
- Medication.
- Lack of exercise.
- Depression.
- Burnout or stress.
- Underactive thyroid.
- Low motivation.

**Note:**

Fatigue may be a symptom of a physical or mental health problem. If your lack of energy

persists over several weeks, seek the advice of a health care professional.

## **Short-Term Solutions**

Give yourself a quick boost in any of these ways.

### **Rehydrate Yourself**

Our bodies need water to function. When you're dehydrated, you're depriving yourself of vital fuel, and this can affect your memory as well as your energy levels.

As soon as you feel your energy flagging, reach for a tall glass of water. The Institute of Medicine suggests that men should drink around 3 liters of fluid over the course of a day, and that women drink around 2.2 liters.

This fluid need not be water. However, if you choose another drink, be aware that its ingredients may offset the benefits of pure water. For example, caffeine can cause anxiety, while high-sugar fruit drinks may give a short-term energy boost that's followed by deeper fatigue.

### **Use Light**

If your office has a window, open the blinds to let in plenty of natural light.

If you don't have access to a window, make sure that your lamps are bright enough. Lamps that emit the full spectrum of light (similar to sunlight) can make you feel more alert.

Even the light emitted by your monitor can have an impact, as increased light can suppress sleep-inducing hormones. Adjust the brightness settings on your screen to increase the amount of light given out.

You may also find that a daylight lamp boosts your energy levels. These lamps, designed for people experiencing seasonal affective disorder, are also thought to improve mental alertness.

### **Take a Walk**

A short walk will increase the flow of oxygen to your brain.

You may also find that a change of surroundings, even for a short time, increases your energy levels. If you can, walk with a friend or colleague; this may encourage you to walk further, and can also boost your self-esteem.

Aim to walk in light surroundings to take advantage of the added effects that light has on energy levels.

**Tip:**

Drink plenty of water during and after exercise to replenish fluid levels.

**Listen to Music**

Think about how you feel when you listen to an upbeat, high-energy track. Your attention sharpens, you start tapping your feet, and your spirits seem to rise.

Music can have a profound effect on energy levels. Certain types of music can make you feel more energized, attentive, and awake, while other styles can make you feel calm, sleepy, angry, or tense.

The type of music most likely to raise your energy level is highly personal. You may find that classical music or jazz restores your energy, while others prefer pop or rock. When you feel your energy waning, turn on music that you enjoy.

**Tip 1:**

Music can be energizing, but it can also be distracting. Think about your tasks and whether listening to music could affect your ability to complete them well.

For example, many people find that they cannot concentrate on fine detail when they're listening to music with lyrics. Likewise, some find that they work better if they've set up playlists in advance, as they can avoid stopping work to choose new tracks.

Music can also be distracting for your colleagues. Use well-fitting headphones to avoid spreading your sound.

**Tip 2:**

Depending on the culture of your workplace, you could try other short-term energy-boosting techniques.

For example, aromatherapy - using scents to address specific ailments or conditions - has been shown to be effective at combating fatigue. One study found that the scent of lime made participants feel more alert than those in the control group.

Your colleagues may not welcome aromatherapy in the office, however. The essential oils used can cause sensitivities, and some oils should not be used near people with diabetes, or near pregnant or nursing women.

A short nap can also help you feel more alert. However, your organization may not approve of you "sleeping on the job."

If you're considering this, talk to your boss about whether a short afternoon nap (20 minutes or less) would be appropriate in your workplace. Ask how he or she feels about you taking a short break to nap, even if it's in your car.

## Long-Term Solutions

There are plenty of long-term strategies for improving your energy and focus at work, too.

### Eat Healthier Food

Your diet has a huge effect on how you feel. When you eat poor-quality foods (such as those high in fat, sugar, salt, and artificial ingredients), you don't take in the nutrients that you need to perform at your best.

Some of these foods, such as candy bars or chips, do provide a quick burst of energy by raising your blood sugar levels. However, those levels quickly drop, often leaving you feeling even worse than you did beforehand.

Instead of eating salty or sugary snacks, aim to eat three well-balanced meals every day. You may also want to eat healthy mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks. These include walnuts or almonds, low-fat cheese and whole-grain crackers, fruits and vegetables, hummus, and yogurt.

### Exercise Regularly

One of the best ways to boost your energy is to get regular exercise. Countless studies suggest that exercise is an essential part of a healthy lifestyle.

Regular exercise has also been shown to increase memory and a sense of well-being.

No matter how busy you are, try to make exercise part of your daily routine. Our article on [getting more exercise](#) shows you how to fit physical activity into a jam-packed schedule.

### Find Meaning

Sometimes your energy can wane when you're working on a task that you find boring or meaningless. Routine tasks can numb your mind, and make you feel lethargic.

Look at the tasks that seem to sap your energy the most. These "energy vampires" are often the urgent but not important tasks that you must do regularly. Use the Urgent/Important

Matrix to see how much time you're devoting to these tasks.

Ask yourself whether you really need to accomplish these tasks; if not, see if you can cancel them, or delegate them to someone who may find them more satisfying.

If you've lost some of your enthusiasm for your role, re-examine the purpose in what you do. This will remind you of the impact you make every day, even in small ways.

### **Look At Your Schedule**

How you schedule tasks can also affect your energy. For example, if you're a "morning person," you'll have the most energy before lunch. Your energy might drop in the afternoon and then pick up again in the early evening. If this is the case for you, schedule your hardest, most important tasks in the morning, during your peak energy time.

Our article Is This a "Morning" Task? shows you how to schedule tasks according to your peak time of day.

### **Key Points**

Most of us experience ups and downs in our energy levels. To keep yourself energized, incorporate a balance of short- and long-term strategies.

- Rehydrate yourself.
- Use light.
- Take a walk.
- Listen to music.
- Eat healthier food.
- Exercise regularly.
- Find meaning.
- Look at your schedule.

Keep in mind that several factors can cause you to have low energy. If your energy levels don't improve after a few weeks, seek advice from a health professional to check that there isn't a more serious problem.

References

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### **A Final Note**

It helps to know how to get a quick burst of energy when we're facing a deadline, but boosting your energy long-term will yield even greater results.

Next week, we'll look at Agile Project Management, a project management approach that helps you deliver fast-paced projects in rapidly changing environments.

See you then!



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