Improve Your Energy & Vitality!

by Nancy Hearn

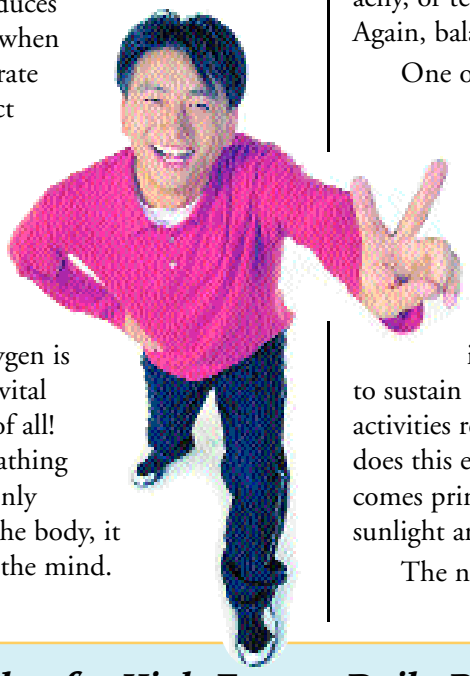
In my practice as a wellness consultant, one of the most frequent complaints I hear from clients is a lack of energy. Related symptoms include lethargy, tiredness, poor concentration, lack of motivation, and exhaustion. Sound familiar? With our fast-paced lifestyle, energy is certainly a valuable commodity and vitality is rare.

Two major factors that contribute to depleted energy reserves are inactivity and inadequate nutrition. So let's tackle inactivity first. Even though we do gain benefits from daily physical activities such as housecleaning, gardening, and mowing the lawn, these types of activities do not take the place of exercise. Physical exercise plays a vital role in optimizing energy—if it is the right kind of exercise.

Lean muscle is desirable, but a body that is muscle bound and full of tension can quickly use up energy stores. Likewise, a body that is overweight and unfit will also deplete vital energy. The key is to engage in daily exercise that is conducive to your body type. It is also important to balance the type of exercise you get.

An ideal exercise program should include activities that foster stamina (e.g., walking, running, or swimming), strength (isometric exercises or weights), and suppleness (stretching or yoga). All too often, I find that people usually choose only one of the three—stamina, strength and suppleness—and thus lack balance in their fitness. So be sure to keep a healthy balance of stamina, strength, and suppleness in your exercise program.

One way the body produces energy is when carbohydrate foods react with oxygen from the air we breathe. Thus, oxygen is the most vital nutrient of all! Deep breathing will not only energize the body, it will clear the mind.



Many forms of meditation, yoga, and martial arts teach the importance of mastering the breath. However, this is usually not the case with many exercise programs. People often over exercise, and the oxygen deficiency causes toxic substances to build up in the body. This can cause you to feel tired, achy, or tense after exercising. Again, balance is the key.

One of the most important factors in determining how to eat for optimum energy is body metabolism. Metabolism is the sum total of all the biological activities and chemical reactions in the body. In order to sustain life, these metabolic activities require energy. Where does this energy come from? It comes primarily from air, water, sunlight and nutrients (food).

The nutrients in the food we eat are especially important because our bodies use them to repair, build, and heal tissue. They also provide the fuel that is burned, or oxidized, in our cells to provide the energy for metabolism. When maximum energy is available to the cells, organs, glands, and systems in the body, optimum health is possible.

We all need a variety of nutrients, but different people

Example of a High-Energy Daily Plan

- **Upon rising:** Practice deep breathing via meditation, yoga, Tai Chi, qigong, etc. (15 minutes)
- **Breakfast:** Slow-cooking oatmeal (or another high-fiber cereal) with a banana and rice or almond milk.
- **Mid-morning snack:** A handful of almonds, walnuts or seeds.
- **Lunch:** A large raw vegetable salad with dressing and lentil soup
- **Mid-afternoon snack:** An organic apple or half a cup of berries
- **Before dinner:** Exercise for 20-40 minutes, alternating strength and stamina (followed by 5-10 minutes of stretching)
- **Dinner:** A large serving of raw or lightly cooked vegetables along with beans, legumes, fish, or lean meat.

have different genetic requirements for different types and amounts of nutrients. Thus, there are different metabolic types. There are several available sources for determining your own metabolic type. (See *The Metabolic Typing Diet* by William Wolcott and Trish Fahey, or *Dr. Mercola's Total Health Program* by Dr. Joseph Mercola. Many health practitioners and nutritionists can also provide a comprehensive metabolic analysis.) Once you've determined your metabolic type, you can use this information to choose the best foods and supplements for your body.

What kinds of foods or drinks do you use to boost your energy? Most people know how to bolster their energy using either wholesome foods or quick pick-me-ups like sugar, chocolate, snack foods, and caffeine. If you choose the latter, you may get a quick boost, but there's a price to pay. In reality, these types of foods and drinks will only deplete your energy reserves and make you more tired.

In addition, all of these quick fixes are associated with an increased risk of diabetes. I believe they are also some of the main culprits that weaken our immune system and make us more vulnerable to many unhealthy conditions, including certain types of cancer, autoimmune disorders, as well as heart disease.

If you want to maximize your energy and vitality for life, the nutrition plan is fairly simple:

1. Eat whole, fresh foods (preferably organic).

2. Eat the types and quantities of foods for your metabolic type.

3. Take quality, highly absorptive multivitamin and mineral supplements, a broad-spectrum antioxidant formula, 2,000 mg vitamin C daily, and fish oil daily.

4. Avoid processed and refined food of all sorts.

5. Avoid sugar and all artificial sweeteners.

6. Avoid stimulants and depressants.

I highly recommend that you give up stimulants for one month and see how you feel. Even though you may experience some withdrawal symptoms (such as a mild headache) for a few days, you will most likely experience substantially more consistent energy throughout the day and a better ability to cope with stress. There are also plenty of herb and fruit teas, as well as coffee substitutes available.

The other significant dietary change you can make to improve your energy and vitality is to reduce your sugar content gradually until you get used to less sweetness. (By the way, this includes all forms of sugar, including white sugar, brown sugar, honey, and syrup.) For example, instead of the sugary breakfast cereals, look for the cereals with high fiber and no sugar content and then add banana, berries, or apples for sweetness. If you drink juice, dilute the juice 50/50 with water. Beware that most "low-fat" foods have additional sugar added for taste. Read labels carefully and avoid all artificial sweeteners. ■

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