

Healthy eating

Eating for energy

Food is our primary fuel source. Eat the right things, at the right times, in the right amounts and you will boost your energy. To boost energy, think about your food in a new way - eat for energy.



Note: The information below should not replace advice given by a healthcare professional if you have a medical condition that affects energy such as diabetes. Always follow the advice of your primary carer or GP if in doubt.

Eat for energy - concentrate on carbohydrates:

Carbohydrates contain glycogen (glucose) which is a great energy source. It is also a vital energy source - any imbalance to the supply of glucose to the brain and you can experience fatigue, irritability, dizziness, insomnia, poor concentration, forgetfulness, excessive thirst, mood changes and digestive disturbances. But eating too much carbohydrate is not good as excess amounts get stored as fat. Balance is therefore the key!

6-point action plan for eating carbohydrate for energy

Step 1 - Eat within 1 hour of waking

Studies show that people who eat breakfast report being in a better mood and have more energy throughout the day. The body needs to have carbohydrates (glycogen) within 1 hour of waking to fuel the brain (your brain is fuelled by oxygen and glycogen). If the brain is deprived the body has to work extra hard to break down any stored carbohydrate or turn fat or protein into a usable form of energy for your brain to function. The longer you leave eating, the less fuel the brain has.

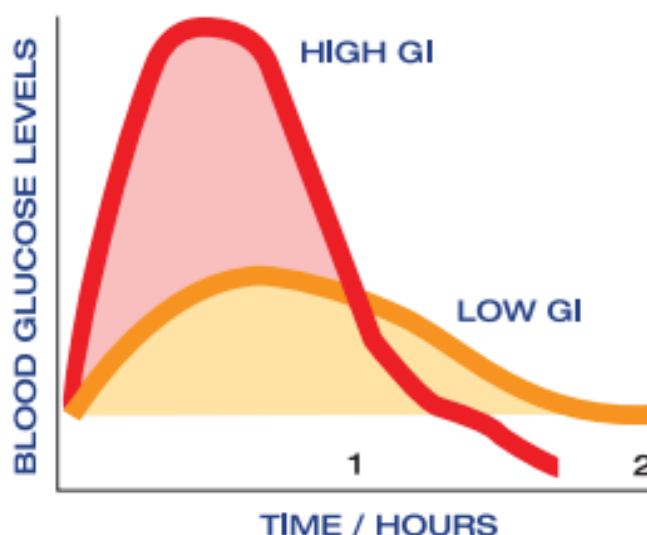
Step 2 - Consider what carbohydrates you eat
Not all carbohydrate foods are created equal; in

fact they behave quite differently in our bodies. Some have higher levels of sugars than others and it's the carbohydrates with lower levels of sugar that are better for sustaining energy levels.

Glycemic Index (GI)

The Glycemic Index describes this difference by ranking carbohydrates according to their effect on our blood glucose (sugar) levels.

Low GI carbohydrates produce only small fluctuations in our blood glucose and therefore provide us with more stable energy levels over a longer period of time, whereas high GI foods provide us with a 'blood sugar rush' and then a 'slump'. If our energy levels are continually up and down (because a large proportion of our diet uses high GI foods) we tend to feel tired, lethargic & low



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Simply swap high GI carbohydrates for low GI carbohydrates in your diet. You don't need to count numbers or do any sort of mental arithmetic to make sure you are eating a healthy, low GI diet. On the basis that your two main 'fuel stops' for energy during the working day are breakfast and lunch, then simple ideas include:

For breakfast:

- Swap sugary fortified cereals for ones based on oats, barley and bran
- Use breads with wholegrain, stone-ground flour, sour dough rather than white breads
- Eat natural yoghurts rather than pastries
- Swap tea/coffee for fruit juice
- Have your eggs boiled or poached rather than fried

For lunch:

- Eat sandwiches with brown or wholegrain bread rather than white bread
- Load your sandwich with lots of salad
- Eat fruit, nuts or seeds rather than crisps, cake and chocolate
- Drink juice or water rather than fizzy drinks
- Enjoy pasta or noodles
- Eat plenty of salad or vegetables

To help you understand, at a glance, which carbohydrates are lower GI foods, check out the labels:

Short lasting energy

This product has 7.2g of carbohydrates. 6.5 of which are sugars, per 100g of product.

This means that this food is full of simple sugars and will give short lasting energy.

Simple sugars are found in refined sugars, like the white sugar you'd find in a sugar bowl.

Nutrition

Typical values (as consumed)	per 100g
Energy	245kJ/58kcal
Protein	4.6g
Carbohydrates	7.2g
of which sugars	6.5
Fat	2.8g
of which saturates	0.2g
Fibre	0.2g
Sodium	0.1g

Longer lasting energy

Look for foods with 5.0g or less of sugars per 100g of the product.

Peanuts for example have a high carbohydrate content but low sugar content - they will give longer lasting energy.

Step 3 - Keep refuelling the body

Eat some low GI carbohydrates every 2-3 hours. Don't skip meals.

Step 4 - Don't over eat

Many people overeat; this is a big cause of sluggishness and lethargy. If you are overweight because you eat too much, your body will need more energy to move the extra weight around!

Keep portion sizes small and eat regularly. Keep snacks to less than 100 calories (a handful of nuts not a 500g bag).

Step 5 - Drink more water

Two-thirds of the human body is made up of water. Without it, we could only live a few days.

Dehydration is one of the leading causes of a lack of energy. The body's cells can only effectively convert glucose into energy if they are hydrated properly; and if you're dehydrated, your body puts it's all its resources into maintaining your water balance instead of into giving you energy.

Everyone's water needs vary, but everyone should carry a water bottle around during the day and keep refilling it.

Step 6 - Drink less caffeine

Many people reach for a cup of coffee every day, and many drink more than recommended. This should come as no surprise, as there are those who swear they cannot function without the caffeine. Caffeine can be found not only in coffee, but in tea, soft drinks, chocolate, and herbs as well.

Psychological tests have shown a combination of caffeine and sugar can improve alertness and performance. But then it wears off, and you get a little bit of a slump afterwards. The high-low effect of caffeine is not as pronounced as it is with sugar, but it is significant enough in that frequent users often experience headaches.

The effect of caffeine varies from person to person. Some people need a few cups before experiencing stimulation, while others feel shaky or jittery with one serving. Caffeine can also interfere with sleep, particularly if it is consumed in the late afternoon.

So the best advice is to try to swap at least two of your normal cups of coffee each day for a drink of water. If you're also sipping water throughout the day, your less likely to get thirsty and therefore less likely to reach for a cup of coffee.

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Healthy eating for energy - simple action points for everyone

Provided we maintain a healthy balanced diet, our bodies can get enough energy and nutrients from the food we eat to meet our daily energy requirements. However, if you don't eat a healthy, balanced diet you'll find that you don't have the natural energy reserves you require.

Fruit & vegetables

How much should you eat? Most of us should **EAT MORE**

- Choose fruit or chopped vegetables as a snack
- Add dried or fresh fruit to breakfast cereals
- Have a salad with sandwiches or a main meal
- Add more vegetables to casseroles and stews
- Eat fruit for dessert

Starches/carbohydrates

How much should you eat? Most of us should **EAT MORE**

- Base your meals around foods from this group
- Opt for wholegrain, wholemeal, whole wheat or brown versions which contain more fibre and nutrients than refined or white versions
- Choose low fat oven chips rather than fried chips or other versions
- Avoid frying or adding too much fat to these foods

Milk and dairy foods

How much should you eat? Most of us should **EAT MODERATE AMOUNTS**

- Choose low fat milk i.e. skimmed or semi-skimmed milk
- Choose low fat yoghurts and cheeses

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein

How much should you eat? Most of us should **EAT MODERATE AMOUNTS**

- Choose lower fat meat products and lean cuts of meat
- Cut off visible fat and skin from meat before cooking and drain away fat after cooking
- Try to grill, microwave and bake meat and fish rather than frying and roasting
- Eat oily fish at least once a week

Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar

How much should you eat? Most of us should **EAT LESS**

- Eat small quantities of these foods
- Choose low fat or reduced sugar foods where possible
- Use spreads and oils sparingly – opt for fats and oils with a high proportion of monounsaturates and polyunsaturates
- Try to limit consumption of sugar-containing foods and drinks between meals
- Try not to add fats to foods when cooking

