

STEADY ENERGY

Nutritionist **Rachel Davis** advises on the foods to eat to help keep your energy up all day.

WHEN YOU'RE on your feet all day it's not always possible to take time out to eat on demand. The key to having lots of energy – and making it last steadily right throughout the day – is through your blood sugar levels.

When the level of glucose (sugar) in your blood drops you feel it as fatigue and often hunger or craving for sweet or starchy foods. The quick-fix solution is to eat something that will quickly raise your blood sugar (usually something sweet).

When you give in to the craving, the sweet food causes your blood sugar to jump up dramatically, which your body responds to with a chain of reactions that causes the blood glucose to drop very rapidly so you get a sudden and big sugar-low, following the sudden and big high. This leaves you back at the beginning again, feeling low in energy and in need of something to eat quickly. And when you are in the practice and can only eat at fixed break times this is impossible.

How to stop the roller coaster

The best way to prevent this pattern is to eat regularly (eat something at each break) and to avoid those foods that send your blood sugar soaring. Avoiding (or cutting down) on stimulants like tea, coffee, chocolate and cigarettes also helps.

Certain foods make your blood sugar rise much more slowly than others and if you eat these foods, your blood sugar stays steady for longer, and you won't get the dramatic response which causes sugar to come crashing down. This means that you are less likely to crave sweet foods and feel tired.

When you have to eat your meals and snacks at fixed times it is particularly important to eat the right foods that will supply you with enough energy to see you through to your next break and not leave

you craving sweet foods.

Steady Energy Foods

You should try to avoid sugary or refined starchy foods as these are the ones that make your blood sugar jump up. High fibre foods produce a slower, more controlled release of energy and since fibre tends to be removed in processing, the more processed a food is, the more it will make your blood sugar jump around. So when choosing what type of bread to eat, for example, remember that wholemeal bread is less processed and contains more fibre than a French baguette and so will keep your energy levels up for longer. The presence of protein in your meal also makes food slower to digest and so teaming your bread, rice or potatoes with fish, beans or lean meat will also give you more sustained energy.

What to eat

It is a good idea to eat something at every break, even if you don't feel hungry because if you go too long without eating, when you next get the chance to eat, you will probably feel starving and make the wrong food choices – opting for the instant fix rather than the steady supply.

B vitamins

These are essential for the conversion of food into energy your body can use. Whole grains are a good source of B vitamins, as well as being high in fibre and so wholemeal bread will give you both steady energy and a good source of these important vitamins.

If you follow this advice you're less likely to crave sweet foods, and more likely to make it through the day without fatigue or the need for unscheduled breaks.

Breakfast

- Muesli made with different flakes, nuts seeds and chopped dried fruit
- Porridge with added seeds and a grated apple.
- Rye bread toasted with scrambled eggs, herbs and grilled tomatoes or mushrooms.
- Wholemeal toast with sugar free cashew nut butter or hummous or avocado.

Snacks

- Fruit (any except dates and ensure a good variety)
- Dried fruit
- Oatcakes
- Ryvita with hummous or nut butters
- Homemade flapjack with dried fruit and nuts
- Handful of nuts (not salted or roasted)
- Natural yoghurt
- Wholemeal toast
- Breakfast cereal (sugar-free)
- Fruit juice or smoothie

Lunch – and follow it with a piece of fruit

- Wholemeal pasta salad with watercress, tomato, spring onion, carrot and kidney beans or canned mackerel/sardines.
- Turkey sandwich on wholemeal bread with spinach, peppers and dressing of yoghurt, lemon juice and olive oil.
- Lentil soup and rye bread toast
- Salad of pot barley with roasted Mediterranean vegetables and smoked tofu.
- 3 bean salad (kidney, chickpeas and haricot beans with garlic, red onion, chopped mint, lemon juice and olive oil.)



Challenging the image of meditation

Stressed out? **Lisa Stafford** discovers that meditation is for normal people too.

It all started by accident. After a panic attack, courtesy of London Underground delays, my GP recommended that I take control and try meditation. I expected the stereotypes; bare-footed vegans banging drums and chanting in a candlelit room. So it was a pleasant surprise to find twelve quite ordinary people.

As things developed I now teach a class made up of teachers, drivers, pensioners, secretaries and working mothers. All of them have completely different needs and reasons why they are there. The common denominator is that they want to learn how to take control of their stress and anxiety and some want to use something that complements their prescribed medication.

It's a startling fact that stress related illness costs industry over £4 billion a year (CBI 2003) and yet it is only now that work life balance issues have been truly recognised by businesses. Meditation is just one simple way of taking control of stress in your life. Meditation requires no equipment, special clothing or exorbitant gym membership. All it requires is a bit of time.

Before meditation can be fully explored you have to learn how to breathe. Many scorn the idea that they need to be taught how to breathe. That first intake of breath at birth becomes a natural rhythm in us and should not need to be explained. But learning how to control your breath and be in charge of your breathing is the first step in learning how to meditate.

There are some simple ways of checking to see if you are breathing properly.

A good way to see if you are doing it right is to lie or sit with your hand resting on your stomach. Breathe normally, and see if your stomach moves your hand up

and down. If your hand is still, then you are only using the top part of your lungs. Try to push your hand up with each breath as you breathe in. When you find that your hand is moving with each breath, then you are making use of the lower sections of your lungs, and will probably find that you can breathe in for longer.

Whatever you want to call it, meditation is about focusing your mind and learning how to achieve a sense of calm and well being. Guided meditation in a class can help you to escape from everyday life and take you to peaceful beaches, mountain tops and meadows. You can buy tapes now that have guided meditations on them that you can use at home.

Whatever you think about meditation I can only say that it is worth a go. Taking control of stress in our lives, saying no and putting yourself higher up on the priority list can appear to be an overwhelming task but as the Dalai Lama has said 'Judge your success by what you had to give up in order to get it.'

Breathe deeply

- Close your right nostril with your thumb
- Breathe out through your left nostril
- Breathe in your left nostril for a count of 4
- Close both nostrils and hold the breath for a count of 8
- Keep the left nostril closed and breathe out through the right
- Breathe in the right nostril for a count of 4
- Close both nostrils and count to 8
- Keep the right nostril closed and breathe out from the left

** Lisa is chair of the work/life balance group at the BDA and teaches meditation in South East London.*