
What's Zapping Your Energy?

11 surprising things may be draining your energy without you even knowing it.

By Carol Sorgen – from WebMD

Sure, we all get draggy from time to time. A sleepless night here and there, a stressful day at the office, or one too many Krispy Kremes can take their toll. But when you're constantly feeling drained, it might be time to look at what's bringing you down. Check out these energy zappers and see how many apply to you.

1. Sugar

Sugar provides quick energy, but after picking you up, it drops you hard and leaves you looking for more, says Debi Silber, MS, RD, president of Lifestyle Fitness Inc. in New York.

One key to cutting back on sugar is having the right food with you so you don't head to the nearest vending machine. "The best intentions go out the window when you're not prepared," says Florida nutritionist Pamela Smith, RD, author of *The Energy Edge*. Smith tries to make sure she always has healthy snacks on hand, and she advises making sure they contain at least 1 to 2 ounces of protein to keep your blood sugar stable for several hours, combined with a complex carbohydrate to give you a quick boost of energy. Here are a few of her favorites:

- Whole grain crackers and low-fat cheese
- Fresh fruit or a small box of raisins and low-fat cheese
- Half a lean turkey or chicken sandwich
- Plain, nonfat yogurt blended with fruit or all-fruit jam
- Small pop-top can of water-packed tuna or chicken with whole grain crackers

2. Caffeine

Caffeine can also leave us "tired and wired," Silber says. "If we need sleep and we choose caffeine instead, we continue to throw off our natural sleep cycle. If you find that too much caffeine -- whether it comes in the form of coffee, tea, cola, or even chocolate -- is keeping you from getting a good night's sleep, switch to decaffeinated varieties of your favorite beverage (and cut back on the chocolate), says Joyce A. Walsleben, PhD, director of the Sleep Disorders Center at the NYU School of Medicine and author of *A Woman's Guide to Sleep: Guaranteed Solutions for a Good Night's Rest*.

3. Exercise (Too Little or Too Much)

When it comes to fitness, there are two ways to zap energy, Silber says. The first is by not exercising. "Exercise energizes us physically, mentally, and emotionally," she says. "Without it, we're naturally more sluggish." Exercise also enhances our mood by increasing the release of endorphins, a "feel good" chemical that increases energy levels. On the other hand, too much exercise also presents a problem. Overtraining depletes our energy reserves, breaks down muscle, and eventually makes us weaker, not stronger. Overdoing the workouts also

suppresses the immune system, which in turn reduces our resistance to bacterial and viral invasion, Silber says. "We're more vulnerable to illness, which further zaps our energy as a result," she says.

4. Dehydration

"Most people don't drink enough water," says Scottsdale, Ariz., nutritionist Susan Ayersman of Kronos Optimal Health Center. "We need water to flush out toxins, keep our tissues hydrated, keep our energy up." Water is the perfect no-calorie beverage, and you can dress it up by adding citrus slices or a sprig of mint. But when you want another alternative, try 100% fruit juices (while not necessarily low in calories, they contain important nutrients); nonfat milk, which will give you a calcium boost; unsweetened tea (try herbal or decaffeinated); seltzer water with a splash of juice or slice of fruit; homemade lemonade, with lemon, water, and a small amount of sugar or artificial sweetener; or coffee (again, choose decaffeinated if caffeine keeps you up) with skim milk and artificial sweetener; try it iced in hot weather.

5. Lack of Sleep

If you don't get a good night's sleep on a regular basis, chances are, one of these "sleep busters" is keeping you awake, says Joyce Walsleben:

- Stress or anxiety
- Illness
- Noise
- Light
- Overcommitted schedule
- Caffeine
- Alcohol
- Stimulant medications (such as diet pills, cold and allergy remedies, asthma medications)
- Depression or anger
- Fear

To get a better night's sleep, you need to strengthen your natural sleep patterns, says Walsleben, who offers these suggestions:

- **Regularize your sleep-wake patterns.** Get up at the same time every day. If you wake up at 7 a.m. during the week, skip the temptation to sleep in on weekend mornings. Avoid naps, unless you take one regularly. Try to sleep the same amount of time every night. Some people need nine hours of sleep every night; some do fine with less. Find out what works for you and stick to it.
- **Ritualize your cues for good sleep.** Use the bedroom only for sleep and sex. Keep the room quiet, dark, and cool. Get in bed only when you're sleepy.
- **Start a worry notebook.** Using a child's school notebook, on the left side of the page, list the issues that have been running through your mind; on the right side, list actions you can take to resolve those issues.
- **Resist temptation.** That includes alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine, all of which can interfere with sleep.

6. Attitude

A bad attitude will zap your energy, says motivational speaker Sam Glenn, author of *A Kick in the Attitude*. Change your attitude and your energy level, feelings, responses, outlook, and perspectives on your situation change along with it, he says. "This one simple choice can transform your life," Glenn says. "In changing the nature of the way we think and act, we build an attitude force so strong that it will attract favor, opportunities, people, and dreams into our existence."

7. Clutter and Disorganization

Being disorganized or having clutter in your home can make you feel lethargic and lacking in energy and optimism, says Candita Clayton, founder of Your Life Organized in Rumford, R.I.

Looking for lost or misplaced stuff is a huge physical drain. And trying to remember where things are and all you have to get done on your to-do list is a big mental drain, says professional organizer Jamie Novak, author of *1,000 Best Quick and Easy Organizing Secrets*. To cope with clutter, Novak says:

- Give everything a storage place, and put it back when you are done.
- Make a short daily to-do list; when it's on paper, it's out of your head.
- Divide a big pile of "stuff" into smaller containers. A few small sorts are easier than one big one.
- Take action. Choose one area to get under control; set a timer for 20 minutes and dive in.
- See a project through. Do not put the mail down, for example; stand over the shredder and sort it right then.
- Love it or lose it! Keep only the items around you that you find beautiful and uplifting. Sort through the clutter, letting go of items you no longer love. This frees up space for all the items you want to have around.

8. Not Enough Food

Cutting back on calories helps you lose weight, but not eating enough can leave you feeling drained, say Alex Lluch and Sarah Jang, authors of *Simple Principles to Eat Smart & Lose Weight*.

If you maintain a diet that severely restricts calories for long periods of time, your body will have the tendency to go into "starvation mode," they say. Your metabolism will slow down and your energy level will be low. During times of severe calorie restriction the body tends to store calories as fat and burn muscle as a way to conserve energy. Figure out your recommended caloric intake based on your age, weight, level of activity, and the rate at which you want to lose weight.

Waiting too long between meals can also sap your energy, they add. Increase your metabolism by eating enough calories at regular intervals during the day. Try to have something small to eat every 2 to 3 hours. Avoid large gaps of time without food where your hunger completely takes over. If you skip meals, your body starts conserving energy because it lacks nutrients.

9. Stress

Conflict and stress can quickly deplete your energy resources, say Lluch and Helen Eckmann, EdD, authors of *Simple Principles to Feel Better & Live Longer*. To deal with stress, they advise, communicate, compromise, and problem-solve. Cope with anxiety and stress by meditating, taking a walk, or breathing deeply and slowly. Keep a journal or diary by your bedside and write down the top issues that are stressing you out that day, says Rose Forbes, co-author of *101 Great Ways to Improve Your Health*. "By putting your thoughts on paper, you're giving your brain the approval to let them go for the night."

10. Lack of Self-Esteem

Spending all your time pleasing others and trying to fit in can be a big energy zapper, says confidence coach Kathleen Hassan, co-author of *Square Peg in a Round Hole*. "It takes so much energy to wear a mask to the world ... so that others will like you," she says. "It is exhausting and leaves you feeling utterly powerless."

Hassan offers these tips for building self-confidence:

- **Get to know yourself.** Who are you? What makes you unique and different from anyone else?
- **Don't get caught in the comparison trap.** Stop comparing your insides to someone else's outsides. Instead, shift your focus and attention within and learn to become more congruent by having your insides match your outsides. Check in with yourself several times during the day and notice how you're feeling.
- **Affirm your own self-worth.** Replace negative self-talk with positive affirmations. Affirmations are statements made in the present tense as if they've already been achieved, such as: I am worthy and deserving. I make a difference.
- **Rid yourself of jealousy.** Stop focusing on what you don't have, and start appreciating the gifts in your life. Jealousy is one of the most negative energies and attracts more scarcity and lack. Gratitude, along with joy and love, is the most powerful energy.
- **Learn to love and accept yourself -- just the way you are.** Know that you're worthy and deserving of only the best. We teach others how to treat us by the way we treat ourselves, and unconditional love has to begin with you.

11. Saying Yes

Spending time doing things you don't really want to do can be another energy drainer, says Erick Plasker, author of *The 100 Year Lifestyle: Dr. Plasker's Breakthrough Solution for Living Your Best Life-Every Day of Your Life*. Do you tend to do things that fuel you? Or do you find that most of your time is spent on activities that deplete you? "Your personal energy inventory is a reality check on where your energy is being distributed," he says. "I don't want you to perceive it as a list of problems, or a way to defend why things are the way they are. Instead, it is a way to raise your awareness about where all your energy is going and how to get it flowing back into your life." Here are some of Plasker's energy enhancers:

- Quality time with kids
- Reading good books
- Prayer
- Eating healthfully
- Date night with spouse
- Quality time with friends
- Focusing on the positive
- Expressing gratitude
- Massages
- Celebrating special occasions