

Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

Eat Well to Stay Motivated and Energized

DO YOU HAVE TROUBLE EXERCISING at noon or after work even though you're truly committed to exercise and it's the only time you have to work out?

Do you feel so exhausted that you just can't face the gym?

Your diet—rather than simple sloth—may be the problem. If you tend to skip meals in an attempt to save calories, you may be robbing yourself of important fuel for your workout. While skipping meals may temporarily make your stomach feel flatter, doing so can also leave you feeling tired, irritable and unfocused. Then, you'll be tempted to forego your noontime workout, or go home, eat and stretch out on the couch in front of the TV after work.

If, however, you follow some simple, sensible dietary practices throughout your day, you'll get that workout done. And rather than feeling lightheaded and exhausted afterward, you'll be energized and refreshed.

Stay with Feel-good Foods

One key to staying motivated to exercise is to keep the amount of sugar in your blood—and thus, your energy level—stable to prevent ups and downs. You can best do that by eating a series of small meals throughout the day—as many as five or six—that are composed of complex carbohydrates, such as whole grain breads, beans and other vegetables, whole grain crackers and fruit. If you plan ahead and make time for grocery shopping, you can easily pack some simple meals and snacks to take to work with you.

Eating complex carbohydrates helps keep your blood sugar stable because they are digested and absorbed slowly into the blood and don't require your pancreas to produce much insulin. Refined carbohydrates, such as potato chips, doughnuts and cookies, are absorbed very quickly and trigger the pancreas to pro-

duce large amounts of insulin. So, while they may give you an initial boost, your energy will drop off quickly, and your mood will follow.

The amount of sugar in your blood is also related to the amount of serotonin in your brain. Serotonin is an important chemical called a neurotransmitter that helps to regulate mood. If your level of serotonin is where it should be, you'll have a sense of well-being and confidence—and feel ready to tackle the treadmill. Should it drop, you may feel tired and depressed. If you often experience a craving for carbs, this may be your brain's way of telling you it needs more serotonin.

You'll keep your motivation to exercise if you:

- Have a glass of juice to boost your energy before a morning workout.
- Eat a breakfast that includes whole grains and fruit or fruit juice.
- Eat small, frequent small meals and snacks during the day to maintain your blood sugar.
- Make sure to have a light, healthy snack an hour before your noon or after-work workout.
- Stay hydrated, keeping a water bottle at your desk at work.
- Limit—or eliminate—the amount of caffeine in your diet.

Cut the Caffeine

What about caffeine? Good question. Many athletes rely on caffeine for the initial kick it can provide. Remember, though, that caffeine can also affect the amount of insulin, and thus, sugar, in your blood. Further, it can cause dehydration, which can also sap your energy.

While drinking a caffeinated beverage may help get you to the gym, within an hour you may

feel tired and too lightheaded to complete your workout, or to do it well.

If you plan to engage in running or other highly vigorous activity, remember that some forms of caffeine, coffee in particular, can lead to mild gastrointestinal distress, as can some bulky foods. So, you'd be wise to limit the amount of coffee, tea and soda that you drink for a number of reasons.

Suppose you're an early bird, and your best time to work out is in the morning before you go to work. For quick energy, drink some juice upon rising and avoid coffee. Once you've completed your workout, have a more solid breakfast of whole-wheat cereal or toast and fruit to fuel your concentration for the morning's work. If you work out and eat too lightly, chances are you'll get "the drowsies" by 2 p.m., if not sooner.

Keep in mind that finding the right combination of food and drink to energize your workout—whatever time of day you choose—may take some experimenting. It all depends upon your individual tastes and your metabolism. With a little patience, an open mind and a little creativity, you'll determine which foods suit you best.

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