



Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

Overcoming Fatigue with Food and Activity

The National Sleep Foundation says fatigue is common in a society determined to do more with less—less sleep, that is. Other cultures use a mid-afternoon nap to recuperate from stress. Americans are more likely to use caffeine in coffee, soft drinks and the ubiquitous “energy” drinks on the market nowadays to drive themselves past exhaustion, despite drawbacks such as increased anxiety and other possible health risks.

The best thing for health is a reasonable night’s sleep. But until we are willing to accept that we are not designed to work 24/7, preventing energy drops through balancing blood sugar levels can be helpful. Experts recommend against quick blood-sugar boosts, but pomegranate juice, instead of caffeine or sugar, is a good choice.

The key to properly preventing blood-glucose slumps—which can lead to fatigue, headaches, a craving for sweets, depression, irritability and a host of other symptoms—is a return to the basics of nutrition. In one study, a breakfast rich in fiber and carbohydrates caused higher alertness, while high-fat meals led to lower alertness and higher caloric intake throughout the day. Another study showed that protein-rich or balanced meals, which cause less variation in blood glucose levels, improved cognitive performance.

Inadequate glucose is not the only thing contributing to fatigue. It can result from anemia—iron, B12, B6 or folic acid deficiency, as well. Omega-3 fatty acids, leafy green vegetables and vitamins C, E and B12 have been shown to improve memory and cognitive functioning.

Even with adequate sleep and nutrition, our lack of motion can regularly put us to sleep. To prevent mental fatigue, try starting the day with exercise. Also take frequent 5- to 15-second microbreaks (shoulder rolls or stretching) throughout the day. Make sure to get up and walk around at least every two hours. Avoid the “working lunch.” Do the opposite of what your job entails. For people with mentally challenging occupa-



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tions, experts suggest a walk or other physical exercise. For those whose work is physically taxing, brain-stimulating activities are good.

And watch your posture! Imbalanced body postures, such as slouching, also require the body to consume more energy. In addition to adopting an “energy-efficient” standing position, with feet shoulder-width apart, and sitting straight, which helps improve circu-

lation, take frequent 60-second “Stand up, Perk up” breaks that combine relaxation, breathing and stretching.

To those in urgent need of quick re-energizing, consider aerobic exercise instead of coffee. It’s quick and easy—and it stimulates brain chemicals that give us a lift.

Whether re-energizing through sleep, nutrition, exercise or—better yet—a combination of all three, it’s clear that fatigue should not be taken lightly. It’s connected with depression—antidepressants are now the fastest-growing prescribed class of medications. Instead of taking stimulants, opt for proper exercise, adequate sleep and a balanced diet.

This patient information page is a public service of the American Chiropractic Association. The information and recommendations are appropriate in most instances but they are not a substitute for a diagnosis by a specialist. ■



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