

Foods for energy

“Any kind of carbohydrate will give you energy, but what’s important is that your blood sugar is set in the morning.”

By Eleni Collins

We are what we eat, and nowhere is it more apparent than when it concerns our energy. Food can raise or diminish the body’s energy levels. Yet, according to statistics, 2.2 million Americans experience long-lasting fatigue. Many factors contribute, but experts say that among otherwise healthy people, poor nutrition is the primary factor along with dehydration. If you are not well hydrated, your body puts its resources into maintaining water balance instead of providing energy.

After reading several new studies, Nisa Counter of NisaFit, has eliminated all dairy, eggs, and coffee from her diet, and suggests others do the same. Ms. Counter

er runs a yearly boot camp, teaches aerobic and strength training classes, and is a personal trainer.

“I’m strict vegan, the dairy part has been hard for me because it makes it very difficult for me to eat out,” she says. “I feel the best I’ve ever felt. I definitely noticed a significant difference in the way I feel and the way that I look.”

Adding more vegetables to your diet and removing foods with sugar, specifically high fructose corn syrup,



PHOTO BY RALPH STEWART

often improves energy.

Research shows that breakfast improves alertness and concentration, and prevents obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. “For breakfast, I recommend for all my boot camp girls steamed broccoli and avocados,” says Ms. Counter. “It’s the best breakfast you can have. Broccoli has tons of proteins, and it’s a really good way to start the day. Avocados have a lot of good fat, so they start your day with tons of energy. They

get your metabolism going.”

Steamed vegetables may not sound appetizing for breakfast, but Ms. Counter encourages people to eat more greens at any time of day. “Any sort of steamed, very green vegetable is good,” she says. “The more steamed or raw vegetables you can get into your body, the better.”

Lisa Vunk, of Eat for Life, is a holistic nutritional consultant, chef, and educator. For breakfast, she recommends people eat a small

portion of carbohydrates and proteins, which helps regulate one’s blood sugar throughout the day. Protein maintains cells, transports hormones and vitamins, and creates muscle. Protein makes up many muscles and hormones. Replenishing the body’s source of the nutrient is very important.

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the morning," says Ms. Vunk. "You want a small amount of protein that will help set your blood sugar and balance it. That will give you constant and consistent energy."

Ms. Vunk stresses that breakfast protein does not need to come from eggs, a common belief among people. "There's a lot of protein in all sorts of vegetables," says Ms. Vunk. "It's good to eat a small amount of protein, any kind: yogurt, sprouts, sunflower seeds in your yogurt. A little bit gives you energy for the whole day."

Ms. Counter advises having a salad for lunch, adding a heavy grain such as chickpeas, beans, or quinoa for extra energy and to feel full. "Quinoa is an ancient grain," she says. "It's a complete protein. You cook it like rice, and it's really yummy. You can put it in your salad too. I think it's much better than rice."

For dinner, Ms. Counter

recommends soups and more salad.

If you are eating healthily and are still tired, try changing the frequency of your meals. Some people find they get more of a boost with several small meals throughout the day, while others prefer the traditional concept of three square meals daily.

The amount of food you eat can also make a difference. If someone overeats constantly, they tend to gain more weight and become lethargic.

Other dietary reasons for fatigue include too much alcohol and lack of certain vitamins and minerals. Low iron is a common problem for women. Certain diseases, medications, stress, and inadequate sleep and exercise can also cause fatigue.

Many people depend on caffeine to get themselves going, but the effect depends on the individual. Caffeine high lasts approximately two hours. If it is consumed in the late afternoon, caffeine can interfere with sleep. It



Nisa Counter.



Lisa Vunk.

PHOTO BY RALPH STEWART

also has a dehydrating effect.

Ms. Vunk recommends eating nothing processed, packaged, carbonated, or fried. "It's drastic for people, but of all the things to avoid to have more energy, is genetically modified foods: msg and Aspartame," says Ms. Vunk. "They're in everything: msg as a byproduct doesn't have to be listed on the label. They're both highly addictive, and are known to be carcinogenic."

How do you stay away from something that's in practically everything? Stay away from packaged foods, even foods labeled organic. Ms. Vunk suggests taking advantage of the community shared agriculture programs and family farms on the Island. "Health food isn't supposed to be a couple pieces of lettuce with no dressing. Eat fats, eat lots of fat; use coconut oil, which does not need to be broken down to be digested, and olive oil for energy." ♦



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