

## Ten Ways to Boost Energy Levels

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As New Englanders settle into fall, they are approaching that time of year when the pounds shed for summer creep back on, inactivity sets in, and energy levels can droop. Comfort foods once again make their way to our plates, and for many people the fact that they don't have to face a bathing suit for another year is an invitation to letting healthy eating habits get tucked away, too.

There are some easy strategies, however, to help fend off winter weight gain and keep you feeling energized throughout the year. Not only will this approach help you to feel better, it will probably help you to look better and will definitely help you to have energy to do the things you love.

Take a look at how your own habits compare with this list, and take steps to follow this plan throughout the winter months.

**#1 Eat breakfast.** The most common mistake people make when attempting to lose weight is skipping breakfast in order to “save a few calories”. However, skipping meals is a surefire way to sabotage your efforts. Skipping meals can slow down your metabolism (your body conserves energy to fend off starvation), and can set you up for overeating later in the day. Studies consistently show that people who skip breakfast usually end up eating more calories later in the day, probably because they are ravenous by that time.

**#2 Eat small, frequent meals throughout the day.** This will not only help to keep you from overeating (see tip #1), but will help to keep blood sugar levels constant throughout the day, preventing those energy dips that can zap your stamina and willpower.

**#3 Include a protein source at each meal.** Research suggests that after protein is eaten the brain releases the neurotransmitter norepinephrine, which heightens the sense of alertness and mildly stimulates the brain. Eating large amounts of carbohydrates, in contrast, releases the neurotransmitter serotonin, which has a calming effect (this may explain the tradition of cookies and warm milk before bedtime). Lowfat sources of protein such as lean meats, beans, legumes and dairy products are best, as they will help to keep energy levels high while keeping fat in check.

**#4 Choose a diet that is lowfat and rich in whole grains, fruits and vegetables.** In other words, follow the food pyramid! This approach will provide you with a variety of vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals and antioxidants to help slow down the aging process and reduce the risk of disease. In addition, a lowfat diet means that you can spend less energy on digestion and more energy doing the things you love. Fiber is an added benefit too, as it helps to reduce constipation and the risk of heart disease.

**#5 Include iron rich foods every day.** Iron is an important component of hemoglobin, which travels in the blood and carries energy-giving oxygen to your cells. Lean meats, legumes, beans, dark

leafy greens, fortified cereals and breads are all good sources of iron. Eating a source of vitamin C when you include iron-rich foods will help to increase iron absorption. For example, a glass of orange juice with iron-fortified cereal in the morning or tomatoes in your chili will boost the amount of iron absorbed from these meals.



**#6 Drink alcohol in moderation.** Although a glass of red wine a day can help to improve cardiovascular health, overdoing alcohol is a surefire way to zap your energy, as it acts as a depressant on the central nervous system. Alcohol also contains 7 calories per gram, which is nearly twice as much as protein or carbohydrate. This is why it is easy to pack on the pounds with just a few added drinks per week. For truly optimal energy you may want to avoid alcohol altogether, or at least limit alcohol to no more than one glass per day.

**#7 Get adequate rest.** Never underestimate the power of sleep. In order to have all your brain's cylinders ready to focus on the task at hand, make every effort to be well rested. Establish soothing evening rituals to help you get more consistent sleep, such as a warm bath, relaxing music, reading to your children or swapping foot rubs with your spouse. Being well rested is an essential key to staying focused throughout the day.

**#8 Keep stress levels in check.** Easier said than done, no doubt. But the bottom line is that life will always bombard you with sources of stress, and it is important to find ways to manage that stress so that it doesn't do a number on your health. High stress levels are associated with decreased immunity, insomnia, stomach upset and a host of other maladies. The less energy you devote to stress, the more energy you have to do the things you love.

**#9 Get out there and move.** Be active, no matter what the activity. Whether you love to sweat it out at the gym or simply enjoy gardening in your backyard, experts agree that physical activity is good for increased energy and stamina. Physical activity also releases chemicals in the brain called endorphins, which produce a heightened sense of well being and euphoria. Exercise will also help you to sleep better (good for tip #6), reduce stress levels (see tip #7), and help to keep your weight in check.

**#10 Drink plenty of water.** A loss of just one percent of your body's water stores can cause you to feel sluggish, and research shows that mild dehydration can impair both mental and physical performance. To keep your mental edge, be sure to drink at least 8-10 glasses of water each day, and even more during hot weather or exercise.