

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 workouts. 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. 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 or crackers, beans and other vegetables 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 produce 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.

- 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

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