

# health

## 10 WAYS TO BOOST YOUR ENERGY

**Running on empty? Try these fatigue fighters**

Do you feel tired from the minute you pick your head up from the pillow in the morning until it falls back there at night? Are you battling exhaustion with coffee so you can check off just one more item on your to-do list? Do you skip activities you might enjoy because you “just don’t have the energy”?

If you’re a Black woman, chances are you answered yes to at least one of these questions. It’s okay to be tired after a long, invigorating day filled with activities you love. But far too many of us are chronically exhausted all the way to the bone. “The life many Black women lead is defined by multiple roles and multiple worries that create energy-zapping stress,” says Lorraine Cole, Ph.D., president and CEO of the Black Women’s Health Imperative. “Since we first landed on the shores of this country, we’ve been doing it all. We’re so busy that we rarely do things that bring us joy or are good for our health. That’s when fatigue sets in.”

The words of activist Fannie Lou Hamer, *I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired*, should be our rallying cry. There’s no reason to let society’s 24/7 lifestyle sap the vibrant spirit that has always been in our cultural DNA. Health writer Judith Springer Riddle asked experts for tips on putting the pep back into your step. But reading the list, yawning and saying amen isn’t enough: You have to commit to change—whether minor adjustments or major overhauls—to truly energize your life. ▸



**1. Straighten up.** Your mother knew what she was talking about when she told you to stand up straight. Bad posture slowly siphons off energy. When you slouch, your muscles have to work harder just to hold you up and that can tire out the body. In fact, just 15 minutes of reading or typing in the wrong position exhausts the neck, shoulders and upper-back muscles, according to the International Chiropractors Association. Poor posture also compresses the internal organs so your body can't function as efficiently as it should. To maintain good posture, try these tips: When standing, keep your shoulders and hips lined up, with your head straight, not tilted or turned to the side. When sitting, use a chair with good lower-back support and keep your knees a little higher than your hips. Many posture no-nos happen when you've been in one position too long, so try to take a one- or two-minute break every 20 minutes at work and make sure the equipment in your work space is positioned correctly. For instance, your computer should be 15 degrees below eye level.

give them a quick rest. Make a conscious effort to blink more, and if that doesn't help, invest in lubricating eyedrops.

**5. Play it by ear.** Practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine believe that by stimulating the many pressure points in the ear you can increase your energy flow. While many M.D.'s have not embraced the theory, not all Western doctors think it's bunk. "Massaging your ears really can help you feel more alert," says Mark Hyman, M.D., coauthor of *Ultraprevention* (Scribner). The next time you need a boost, remove your earrings and gently rub your whole ear with your fingers for about one minute. You'll feel your ears getting warm—a sign that the blood is circulating in the area—but more important, you should feel more pep.

**6. Break a sweat.** Engaging in exercise can do much more than just help you maintain a healthy weight. Doing an aerobic workout for at least 30 minutes each day can rev up your engine, according to the National Institutes of Health. The next time your energy flags at work, take a five-minute break to walk around the office, stretch or just shake out your arms and legs. The movement will keep your body and mind more alert. And here's an added benefit to those who exercise regularly: sounder sleep. According to a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, people who worked out four times a week for at least 30 minutes fell asleep 12 minutes earlier and slept 42 minutes longer than folks who didn't work out.

**7. Junk the java.** A steaming cup of coffee can perk you up and clear your mind. But because caffeine is also a diuretic, drinking too much can cause energy-draining dehydration, not to mention keep you up at night running to the bathroom. Limit your caffeine intake to 200 to 300 milligrams a day, which is equivalent to two to three cups.

**8. Zero in on zinc.** Zinc metabolizes the production of the hormone insulin, which enables the cells in the body to convert the glucose in the blood into energy. Experts recommend getting 8 milligrams of zinc a day. Lean cuts of beef such as chuck, tenderloin, eye round and liver are great sources of zinc, as are oysters, eggs, whole grains, almonds and sunflower seeds.

**9. Forgo the fat.** Eating a high-fat meal versus a low-fat one can mean the difference between feeling drained and feeling invigorated. The reason: Fatty foods are harder to digest than other types, so your body uses up a great deal of energy to process them and that can leave you feeling sluggish, says Elisabetta Politi, R.D., nutrition manager at Duke University Diet and Fitness Center in Durham, North Carolina.

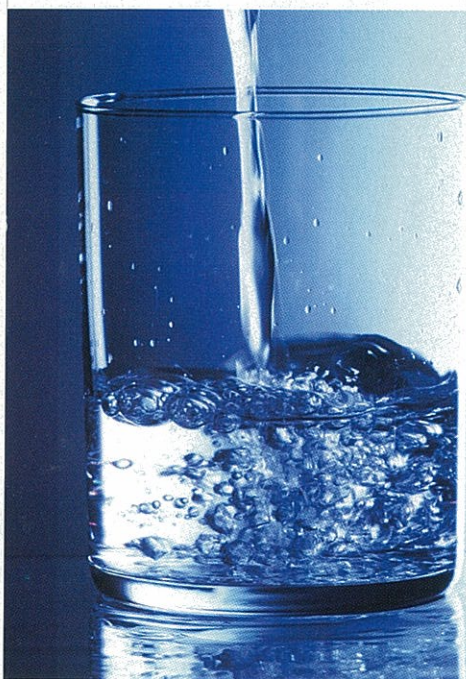
**10. Take a deep breath.** Too often we shallow-breathe or even hold our breath without realizing it, especially when we're under stress. The correct way to breathe is called belly or diaphragmatic breathing: Breathe slowly and deeply with your belly and spine relaxed, and allow your belly to expand as you inhale. Focused breathing can also help you get your second wind. Elaine Gavalas, author of *The Yoga Minibook for Energy and Strength* (Fireside), suggests this one to reenergize: With your mouth closed, inhale through your nose for four counts, hold your breath for one count, and then exhale through your nose for eight counts. —JUDITH SPRINGER RIDDLE >

## 2. Chug some H<sub>2</sub>O.

Water may not be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of energy boosters, but dehydration is often overlooked as a cause of fatigue. Drink six to eight 8-ounce glasses a day, and more if you've been working or playing in the summer sun.

**3. Pump some iron.** Iron helps your red blood cells transport energizing oxygen to every cell in your body. But nearly 20 percent of women are iron-deficient. Eating a diet rich in lean red meat, fish and poultry is a good way to get 15 milligrams of iron a day, the recommended dose for females ages 11 to 50. Legumes, fortified cereal and beans are also good sources of iron.

**4. Do an eye check.** Studies have shown that the average person blinks two thirds less often than usual while using a computer. So if you're stuck on one all day at work, or you're a hard-core Web surfer, you may be setting yourself up for dry eye, a condition that not only leaves your eyes feeling strained and fatigued, but can also sap your energy overall. The next time you work on the computer, take a minute every now and then to close your eyes and



## The Do's and Don'ts of a Good Night's Sleep

**S**leep experts recommend eight hours of sleep a night to get adequate rest and maintain good health. Yet during the workweek, the average woman gets less than seven hours of sack time. If you're not getting enough Z's, these tips can ensure sweet dreams—starting tonight.

**DO** establish a routine. Go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time each day, says Margaret Moline, Ph.D., director of the Sleep-Wake Disorders Center at New York-Weill Cornell Medical Center in White Plains. Hitting the hay late on Friday and Saturday night and sleeping in on Saturday and Sunday morning will prevent you from falling asleep at your regular bedtime Sunday evening.

**DON'T** work in bed. Maintain your bed as your private oasis of calm. That means never bringing office work, and all its stress, to bed. And if reading or watching television tends to stress you out or overstimulate you, confine those activities to other areas of the house as well, says Moline.

**DO** ditch all P.M. caffeine. Forgoing a cup of coffee with that late-night snack is a no-brainer. But don't forget that caffeine is also found in chocolate, colas and other sodas, and in coffee-flavored ice creams and yogurts.

**DON'T** try to drink and dream. Drinking alcohol at night can shorten the time you spend in the deeper stages of sleep that leave you rested in the morning. If you usually indulge in a glass of wine with dinner, try to have it at least four hours before bedtime.

**DO** design your bedroom for rest. Choose bedding, drapes and wall color in soothing shades of beige and white or blue and green, suggests Barbara Finch, a professional feng shui consultant in Playa del Rey, California. Use table lamps as your main source of lighting instead of harsher overhead lights. To promote sleep, sprinkle a few drops of lavender essential oil on your pillow.

**DON'T** get overheated. If your bedroom gets stuffy in the warmer months, crack open a window before hitting the sack. Sleeping in a room at cooler temperatures promotes restful sleep, says Amy R. Wolfson, Ph.D., an associate professor of psychology at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, and author of *The Woman's Book of Sleep: A Complete Resource Guide* (New Harbinger). A room temperature of 62°F is optimal.

**DO** consider getting a white-noise machine. If you're constantly awakened by the sound of your neighbors, the house settling down, and the traffic outside, Finch advises masking the usual rattle and hum with more soothing sounds.

—J.S.R.



## Are you sick or just tired?

If you think your fatigue could be caused by something more serious than a little too much nightlife, speak to your physician. One of these underlying medical problems may be sapping your energy:

### DIABETES

**Symptoms:** Extreme thirst, weight loss, repeated yeast infections, frequent urination. "Because patients urinate frequently through the night, they do not get adequate sleep," says JudyAnn Bigby, M.D., director, Harvard Medical School Center of Excellence in Women's Health.

**Test:** Blood-sugar test.

**Solution:** Keeping blood glucose at healthy levels by losing weight and following a low-fat, high-fiber diet.

### HYPOTHYROIDISM

**Symptoms:** An underactive thyroid can

cause constipation, hoarse voice, dry skin and hair, menstrual irregularities and weight gain.

**Test:** Blood test for TSH (thyroid-stimulating hormone) levels.

**Solution:** A daily dose of the thyroid-replacement hormone L-thyroxine.

### ANEMIA

**Symptoms:** Weakness, feeling cold, craving ice, pale eyes.

**Test:** CBC (complete blood count) test.

**Solution:** Eating iron-rich foods and taking iron and folic-acid supplements help. In some cases, blood transfusions and medication may be needed.

### OBSTRUCTIVE SLEEP APNEA

**Symptoms:** You stop breathing in your sleep and wake up gasping for breath. The alarming sensation causes sufferers

to wake up several times a night.

**Test:** Laboratory sleep study during which you are monitored as you sleep.

**Solution:** Bigby says this problem occurs often in overweight women, especially if they have thick necks or tonsil problems. Weight loss can alleviate symptoms; surgery may sometimes be necessary.

### CLINICAL DEPRESSION

**Symptoms:** Loss of interest in activities, insomnia, weight loss or gain, suicidal feelings.

**Test:** "The diagnosis relies heavily on the patient's discussing her symptoms with her doctor," says Sharon Allison-Ottey, M.D., CEO of Coshar Medical, Inc., in Lanham, Maryland.

**Solution:** Antidepressant medication and therapy.

—LASHIEKA PURVIS □