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## Eating the Right Foods for All-Day Energy



Having plenty of zip to meet the demands of your job and personal life starts with your diet.

To maintain your energy level, your body breaks down the food you eat into glucose (blood sugar) — the body's main fuel — and sends a steady stream of it to your cells.

But here's the trick: "To feel energized throughout the day, your blood-glucose level should stay within a certain range," says Neva Cochran, M.S., R.D., a Dallas-based nutrition consultant. "If your blood glucose drops too low — which can happen if you go too long without eating — you're going to feel lightheaded and lethargic."

If you eat the wrong kinds of foods, your blood glucose can spike and drop, eventually causing the same symptoms.

With this in mind, here's how to eat for all-day energy and keep your blood-glucose level stable.

### **Don't skip meals**

Not eating meals is one of the fastest routes to low blood sugar.

If you skip breakfast, your ability to concentrate will likely suffer all morning. Skip lunch, and by 3 p.m. your energy level and concentration will inevitably crash.

The reason: "Your brain needs glucose to function," says Ms. Cochran.

To keep your blood glucose from dipping, and thus zapping your physical and mental energy, eat three meals or six smaller meals a day consistently and don't go more than four hours without eating something.

### **Balance meals**

Make sure your meals include a mix of complex carbohydrates — such as grain products, fresh vegetables and fruit, beans, lentils and other legumes, protein, and some fat.

At breakfast, have waffles topped with fresh fruit (both are mostly carbohydrate) and a cup of low-fat or nonfat yogurt (a mix of protein, carbohydrate, and fat).

At lunch, have a ham-and-cheese sandwich on whole-grain bread (this provides protein, fat, and carbohydrate) and a piece of fruit (this is mostly carbohydrate).

"A combination of carbohydrates, protein and fat helps moderate blood-glucose absorption so your blood sugar rises gradually," says Ms. Cochran.

On the other hand, if you eat only carbohydrates, such as the fruit alone, your blood-glucose level will rise and drop quickly, leaving you hungry and low on energy within an hour or two after you eat.

Similarly, "if you only eat protein, you'll get calories, but they won't kick in fast enough to make you feel energized when you need it," says Ms. Cochran.

### **Snack smart**

To counteract energy lulls you feel during the day, eat snacks that mix carbohydrates, protein, and fat.

Good energy-sustaining snacks include low-fat yogurt with fruit; cheese and crackers; an apple with peanut butter; and low-fat cookies, such as graham crackers or gingersnaps, and a glass of skim milk.

If you experience an energy low that makes you feel shaky or keeps you from focusing on your work, opt for a carbohydrate-rich snack, such as a whole-grain breakfast bar or a glass of fruit juice.

"Doing so will raise your blood-glucose energy levels quickly," says Ms. Cochran. "Either way, be sure to keep your snack light to avoid weight gain."

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