Boost Your Energy

Here are 30 simple, effective ways to increase your energy today.

By **MARC BLOOM**   DEC 8, 2007

Ask your friends, runners included, about their day-to-day problems, and many will say that they feel tired too much of the time. They'd like to have more energy.

No surprise there. With information overload, economic concerns, and the generally accelerating pace of life, many of us feel that our tanks are often low.

We runners do better than most. Thank goodness. Experts say that our workouts give us better health and more energy than people who don't exercise. "If exercise could be packaged into a pill," says renowned aging specialist Robert Butler, M.D., of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, "it would be the single most prescribed and beneficial medicine in the nation."

Still, even runners can become sidetracked by bad habits such as poor nutrition, high stress, and inadequate sleep. To make sure this doesn't happen to you, here are

30 strategies (divided into five broad categories) guaranteed to boost your energy.

Running and Exercise

1 Give yourself a daily high. Try to run or do another form of exercise every day. Exercise promotes better sleep, makes you pay more attention to eating properly, and releases mood-enhancing endorphins that can lead to a "runner's high." Exercise physiologist Ken Sparks, Ph.D., of Cleveland, a leading U.S. masters runner, says, "Endorphins elevate your immune system and give you a big boost of energy."

2 Jump into the pool. The repetitive footstrikes of running can sometimes lead to excessive fatigue for some runners. The solution? Regular cross-training, which provides relief and restores energy. "I love to swim laps in the pool twice a week," says 2:45 marathoner Kim Saddic of West Chester, Pa. "The water enables me to stretch and relax. It feels therapeutic, like a massage, and freshens me for running."

3 Keep your options open. The more flexible you are with your workout alternatives, the less likely you are to miss a run and feel depressed. Erika Pickman, a 29-year-old Edison, N.J., veterinarian, generally runs 5 miles at noon. That's a time of day when she'd otherwise begin to feel lethargic. "The run really rejuvenates me," she says. When Pickman trained for a marathon and needed to run longer, however, she did her workouts at 5 a.m. to make sure she wouldn't miss them later in her busy day.

4 Run with the early birds. There's no "best time" to run for an energy boost, but many runners find that morning suits them for a variety of reasons. Top runner Trina Painter of Flagstaff, Ariz., has two young children who often wear her down during the day. That's why she prefers to run in the morning, when she's fresh from a good night's sleep.

5 Make every step count. You can stay energized not just with formal workouts but also with "informal exercise"-raking leaves, walking at every opportunity, and taking the stairs instead of an elevator. Personal trainer Verna Spier, formerly a counselor at Duke University Diet and Fitness Center in Durham, N.C., advises her clients to take at least 10,000 steps (roughly 5 miles) throughout the course of a day. Her clients wear small pedometers to keep track of their movements.

6 Dare to be different. Vary your running so you'll feel excited about each workout. Change your regular route, try a park in another town, go to a track, explore a new trail, run that hill you've always wanted to tackle, or try running faster once a week as a challenge. "Doing the same run every day is like always eating the same thing for lunch," says New York City sports psychologist Maryellen Duane, Ph.D.

7 Equip yourself better. Exercise equipment enables you to continue your running

program-and maintain energy levels-under difficult circumstances. When Pickman resumed running after giving birth to her first child, she ran at home on a treadmill while her baby slept. Later, she used a jogging stroller to take her child along during her outdoor workouts.

8 Try a new sport...and then another. According to Sparks, all exercise increases energy production in your muscles (deep in your cells where your body's "sparkplugs" reside). So even if you're injured or can't run for some other reason, you can maintain your energy level with other activities such as walking, swimming, biking, strength training, and stair climbing.

9 Double your effort, double your reward. Breaking up your exercise into two workouts-one in the morning, one in the evening-is a great way to stay energized throughout the day. Try 3 miles in the morning and 3 in the evening instead of one 6-miler. Running in the morning prepares you for every challenge you'll face during the day. Running in the evening (at least 3 hours before bedtime) helps promote good sleep.

General Health

10 Follow a regular schedule. When you establish a routine and stick with it, you develop good health habits. Weekends are a tough time for many runners, who fall out of their Monday-through-Friday routine. Painter has noticed that adults she coaches appear listless on Mondays or any day after a holiday. Her advice: Make a weekend schedule, and stick with it. For help, line up a training partner.

11 Stay involved. It seems counterintuitive, but keeping busy can keep you healthy. Notes Pickman: "The busier I am, the more energy I have." Having projects to do gives your day structure and purpose.

12 Aim for eight. If you're tired, it's possible you're dehydrated. Runners especially need to drink several (yes, maybe eight) glasses of water a day. One strategy for

drinking water, writes dietitian Debra Waterhouse, M.P.H., R.D., in Outsmarting Female Fatigue, is to drink a glass of water for every 250 calories of food you eat. An easy way to achieve this is to drink two glasses of water with every meal.

13 Stand tall and proud. Poor posture-hunched shoulders and a shuffling gait-is a sign of energy depletion, says Robert K. Cooper, author of High Energy Living. You can boost energy levels with Cooper's head-position exercise: First, while standing or sitting, bring your chin in toward your chest. "Your head should feel as if it's gently extending upward," says Cooper. "Next, with your neck in this slightly elevated position, nod your head slightly (as if agreeing with someone), but don't bend it forward."

14 Surround yourself with energetic people. Being with optimistic, high-energy friends or co-workers will make you feel likewise. "I surround myself with people who aren't only talented and smart, but upbeat and enthusiastic," says runner Meyer Feldberg, dean of the Columbia University Business School. "Thirty minutes with a negative, whiny individual will suck all the energy right out of me."

15 Follow the sun. Soak in some sunlight (after applying sunscreen, of course) to elevate serotonin levels in your brain, which will boost your mood and energy. A University of Massachusetts study found that hostility and anger were highest in winter and lowest in summer.

16 Avoid allergens. Much chronic fatigue is caused by allergies. Fortunately current prescription antihistamines, such as Claritin and Allegra, can relieve symptoms without making you tired. See an allergist to determine your needs. Running less often in grassy or wooded areas may also help you reduce allergic reactions.

Mind and Body

17 Run to your own drummer. If you're introverted, solitary runs will give you the tranquility you seek and the time you need to sort through your thoughts, says psychologist Duane. If you're extroverted, you'll gain more energy from being with

people, so consider joining a running club for group workouts.

18 Log your emotions. Keep a running diary with not only training and racing data but a record of your emotions. This will help you track your energy patterns and see whether you might be training improperly or racing too much, suggests Kate Fonshell of Ardmore, Pa., 1996 U.S. Olympic Trials 10,000-meter winner who's now completing her doctoral degree in psychology.

19 Give yoga a chance. Consider taking a yoga class, increasingly popular among runners, to loosen tight muscles and "center" your mind. "With its focus on breathing, yoga slows you down, releases tension, and increases energy," says David Hollander, an instructor at New York Yoga Center. "I've worked with many runners who tell me they wish they'd taken up yoga years ago."

20 Set sane priorities. Your energy level is directly related to your mood. Runners are often type-A personalities who tend to take on too much, ultimately burdening themselves with the weight of endless responsibilities. Try to let go and prioritize.

21 Live in the present. Psychologists often advise that we can boost energy and serenity if we "stay in the moment" and steer away from "anticipatory fear." You can start by listening better. "In listening," write Richard Carlson and Joseph V. Bailey in Slowing Down to the Speed of Life, "we are able to recognize the quality of our thinking, our sensations, and life around us. True listening enables us to get back on track and return to the moment."

22 Try some hands-on treatment. Join the massage movement, which saw a 61 percent increase in the number of Americans receiving massages from 1990 to 1997. Regular massage not only loosens a runner's muscles but increases energy. In shiatsu (one of many forms of massage), therapists stimulate acupuncture points with their fingers or elbows to improve your energy flow.

23 Take some time for meditation. Andrew Weil, M.D., the integrative medicine

pioneer, advises us to be more aware of our breathing and to do specific, meditative breathing exercises "to wake yourself up...if you feel mentally sluggish." Here's a simple meditation exercise: Sit comfortably with your back straight and eyes closed. Breathe in and out rapidly through your nose, keeping your mouth lightly closed. "The action of the chest should be rapid and mechanical, like a bellows pumping air," Dr. Weil says.

Diet and Nutrition

24 Eat a snack soon after running. To restore energy following a workout, eat carbohydrate-rich foods such as fruit, veggies, energy bars, or pasta within an hour after you're done, advises Sparks. If you wait a few hours or attempt to "diet" by delaying eating, you'll feel your energy sag after the workout or even the next day.

25 Eat a full breakfast. And make sure it includes some fat. Dietitians emphasize the need for a complete breakfast to help you sustain energy all day. A good breakfast selection: whole-grain cereal with low-fat milk, fruit, and yogurt. "If you take in some fat, such as that found in many granolas," says dietician Susan Kleiner, Ph.D., R.D., of Mercer Island, Wash., "you improve absorption of fat-soluble vitamins such as A and D." A great alternative breakfast: a smoothie with frozen fruit, banana, soy protein powder, orange juice, bran, and peanut butter.

26 Keep on snacking. Surround yourself with healthful snacks. "I happen to think peanut butter is the best sports food, and the best energy source," says dietitian Nancy Clark, M.S., R.D., of Boston, and author of Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook. "Peanut butter and crackers with a cup of tea will sustain you through the late afternoon when energy tends to sag."

27 Eat two lunches. Clark adds that eating two lunches may be the "secret weapon" for high-energy living. People feel hungry every 4 hours, she points out, but too many of us don't eat that way. Instead, we skimp on breakfast and lunch, and eat too much from 6 p.m. to midnight. Clark advises eating lunch at noon and again at 4 p.m. "A runner who needs 2,400 calories a day should have two 600-calorie lunches," she

says. "This will boost your energy when you need it, and also 'ruin' your appetite so you won't eat too much at night."

Sleep Patterns

28 Take the occasional catnap. If you feel droopy in late afternoon, treat yourself to a short, restorative break. Just sit and relax, as Painter does. Or take a nap-20 minutes is enough. "A 20-minute nap is ideal; it'll refresh you as much as an hour," says Joyce Walsleben, Ph.D., director of the New York University Sleep Disorders Center. "In fact, an hour's nap is too long, because it will put you into a deep sleep in the afternoon and disrupt your sleep at night."

29 Let water renew you. If you find yourself worn out at night, take a warm bath, an antidote used by 2:49 marathoner Laurie Parton of Swartswood, N.J. "After a nighttime bath, I have so much more energy the next day," she says. This approach is likewise endorsed by Walsleben, who says a relaxing bath at night promotes restful sleep.

30 Follow a consistent sleep schedule. Most people need at least 7 hours of sleep at night for sufficient rest and recovery, and runners may need more, says Walsleben. She advises maintaining a regular sleep schedule, and avoiding "sleeping in" on weekends, as this can disrupt your sleep pattern. Try not to depart from your regular amount of sleep by more than an hour.

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Marc Bloom's high school cross-country rankings have played an influential role in the sport for more than 20 years and led to the creation of many major events, including Nike Cross Nationals and the Great American Cross Country Festival.
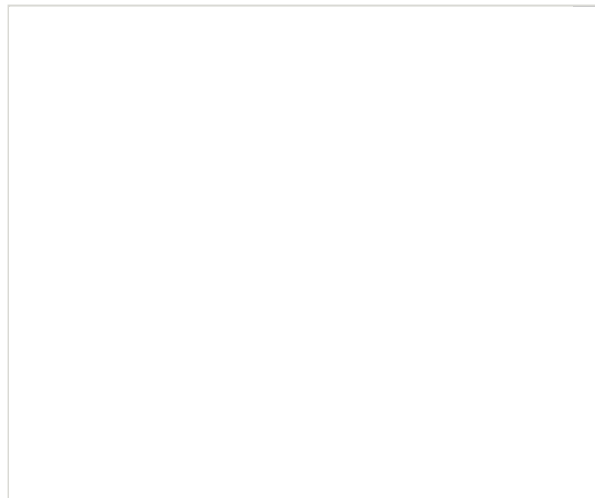
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