



Early mornings, late nights, commitments, demands, responsibilities and expectations can make us feel like we're a sponge that has been squeezed dry of one of our most precious resources: energy. When we walk around feeling like this day after day, it negatively affects almost every aspect of life.

Here are five simple steps you can take every day to ensure that your energy economy ends up in the positive column, so you can do more of the things that feed your soul.

1. Go to Bed and Get Up at the Same Times Every Day

The relationship between going to sleep at night and waking up in the morning used to be simple—when the sun went down, the darkness would trigger the brain to release sleep hormones and neurotransmitters. When the sun came up, the light would trigger wake-up hormones and neurotransmitters.

With this natural, consistent balance of sleeping and awaking, our ancestors had the energy they needed to hunt, gather, build and do anything else they needed to do. Today, our sleep cycle is more dependent on evening television programming than the sun.

We no longer rely on the predictable sun, so it's up to each individual to go to bed and wake up at consistent times so the sleep and waking hormonal and neural processes learn when to do their thing. The more consistent we are, the more efficient the process works. The better we sleep, the more we recuperate our energy.

2. Move More

When you move, you aid in driving blood circulation, which gets more oxygen and glucose to the brain and energy-producing “engines” of the cells (the mitochondria). You also stimulate areas of your brain in charge of coordination, which can also help keep you out of the midday fog. Go ahead and stand up right now and lift your arms above your head. Stay standing for about 10 seconds. You will actually notice a change in your energy even in that short amount of time.

Try to create a work/home environment where you are able to stand up and move frequently. Try parking farther away from destinations, taking the stairs instead of the elevator and standing up for at least a few minutes every 30 to 45 minutes.

Even something as simple as standing up can drive more oxygen and glucose to create energy, so imagine what exercise can do for your energy levels. Every day, do 20 minutes of something that elevates your heart rate—dancing, running, swimming, hiking, jogging, or anything else you enjoy doing.

3. Eat Smaller Meals Frequently

While eating frequent small meals does not appear to play as large a role in weight loss as once believed, this simple daily habit can create a drastic change in your energy levels.

The brain uses glucose (blood sugar) as its food. When it doesn't have enough, or when there is too much, we get tired, foggy, lazy and unfocused. Think about your level of energy when you're really hungry, then consider how your energy levels are after a large meal.

Start each day with a balanced breakfast that includes protein, fat, carbohydrates, and plenty of fruits and vegetables. About three hours later, have a small snack with a similar nutrient profile. You'll be less hungry for lunch and more apt to make better choices when you're not voraciously hungry. Another balanced snack after lunch and before dinner curbs the pre-dinner and even post-dinner snacking, while decreasing the likelihood you'll overeat at dinner.

Fruit, nuts, shakes and other snacks are easy to prepare and carry with you.

4. Stop Multitasking and Instead Create Time Chunks

The more tasks we split our energy between in a given period of time, the poorer our performance on each of the tasks will become. In addition, we use our energy inefficiently when we try to do many things at once, so we end up spending quite a bit of energy with a very limited return on our investment.

Instead of attempting to do multiple tasks at once, create a clear time frame to focus on one thing. This could be as short as a few minutes or it could be hours. Most people will find a “sweet spot,” during which they can apply maximal focus without going off course. If you have to keep up with multiple demands, you may need to create short time chunks. This way, you can use your energy effectively and efficiently on one task, do it well, then move to another task and repeat.

5. Gratitude

When we're flying through each day, trying to keep up with the constant demands being thrown at us, it's easy to slip into “the sky is falling, whoa is me” mode. When we're stressed, our brains work differently. We tend to only see what's in front of us and we lose scope of a bigger picture.

While it's true that things can go very *wrong*, there are always things that are going very *right*, but this can be tough to remember when the going gets tough.

When you let your fight-or-flight brain completely take over for long periods of time, you squander your energy levels and drain them quickly. Something as simple as taking five minutes a day to write down a short (or long) list of things you are thankful for can help turn off, or at least turn down, the fight-or-flight brain. This realization that there are positive things in your life despite negative events can help boost your mood, energy and even performance.

Try one or all of these simple, energy-exploding strategies every day to refill your energy tanks and live an extraordinary life.

Source: American Council on Exercise