

Take charge of your health

'Why am I so tired?'

If you're dogged by fatigue, use this guide to find out whether you're just low on pep or have a health issue

Look over today's to-do list. If it includes whipping up 36 cupcakes for the school bake sale, throwing in four loads of laundry, driving your daughter to cheerleading practice and picking up the dry cleaning, but all you want to do is take a nap, you need an energy makeover—or a doctor. Certain medical conditions can cause chronic tiredness and require more than just extra sleep. Once you rule them out, try some oomph-amplifying tricks to blast through your day, no matter how little time you have.

By Leslie Pepper

Figure out what exactly is making you so pooped

If you're sleeping, exercising and eating right but still feel beat up at the end of the day, your fatigue could be a sign of a bigger problem. See if any of these conditions could be the culprit, and check in with your doctor.

* Anemia

Six million American women of reproductive age are iron-deficient, and half of them will develop iron-deficiency anemia. That's when the body doesn't make enough healthy red blood cells, which carry oxygen to the tissues.

● **Other symptoms:** dizziness, irritability, shortness of breath, pale skin, brittle nails, cold hands or feet

● **How to get a diagnosis:** Request a blood test that measures levels of circulating hemoglobin (a red blood cell protein).

● **What can help:** consuming iron-fortified cereals, lean red meat, lentils, beans, leafy greens, orange juice and strawberries, all of which boost iron absorption. Don't take a supplement without asking your doctor. Excess iron can cause organ damage.

* Depression

People who are depressed are more than four times as likely to develop unexplained fatigue, according to a study published in *Psychosomatic Medicine*. Major depression affects almost 15 million adults, and chronic mild depression affects about 3.3 million adults, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

● **Other symptoms:** sadness, irritability, reduced sex drive, loss of appetite or interest in daily activity, headaches, insomnia, excessive sleeping

● **How to get a diagnosis:** If you have five or more of the symptoms listed above for at least two weeks, see your doctor.

● **What can help:** psychotherapy or cognitive behavioral therapy, with or without antidepressants

* Celiac disease

Almost 3 million people in the United States have this digestive condition. It causes intolerance to gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye and barley, and can damage the small intestine and interfere with nutrient absorption, bringing on fatigue. Celiac disease usually goes undiagnosed because it can be confused with other conditions, including irritable bowel syndrome.

● **Other symptoms:** unexplained iron-deficiency anemia, bone or joint pain, arthritis, bone loss, depression

● **How to get a diagnosis:** Have a doctor perform a blood test to detect certain antibodies (proteins that react against foreign cells) that are higher than normal in those with celiac disease. Then you might undergo an endoscopy or a biopsy of the small intestine.

● **What can help:** following a gluten-free diet

The top energy essentials

Poor health habits can leave you out of gas. Commit to change so you'll feel rested.

1 Adequate sleep
If you stay up late at night or sleep fitfully, you risk conditions such as depression and weight gain. Aim for at least seven hours of shut-eye per night.

2 Balanced diet
Filling up on sugary, fatty foods or simple carbs spikes blood sugar and sets you on a roller coaster of energy highs and lows. Instead, eat at least 2 cups of fruit and 3 to 4 cups of vegetables every day.

3 Regular activity
Sitting or lying around all day actually makes you tired and listless. Take a stroll—it activates feel-good hormones, improves blood flow, moves oxygen to your cells and speeds your metabolism, all of which create energy.

Check your meds

Many antihistamines can disrupt REM sleep. Cold medications, antidepressants and anti-anxiety drugs can make you feel sedated or slow your body's functions.





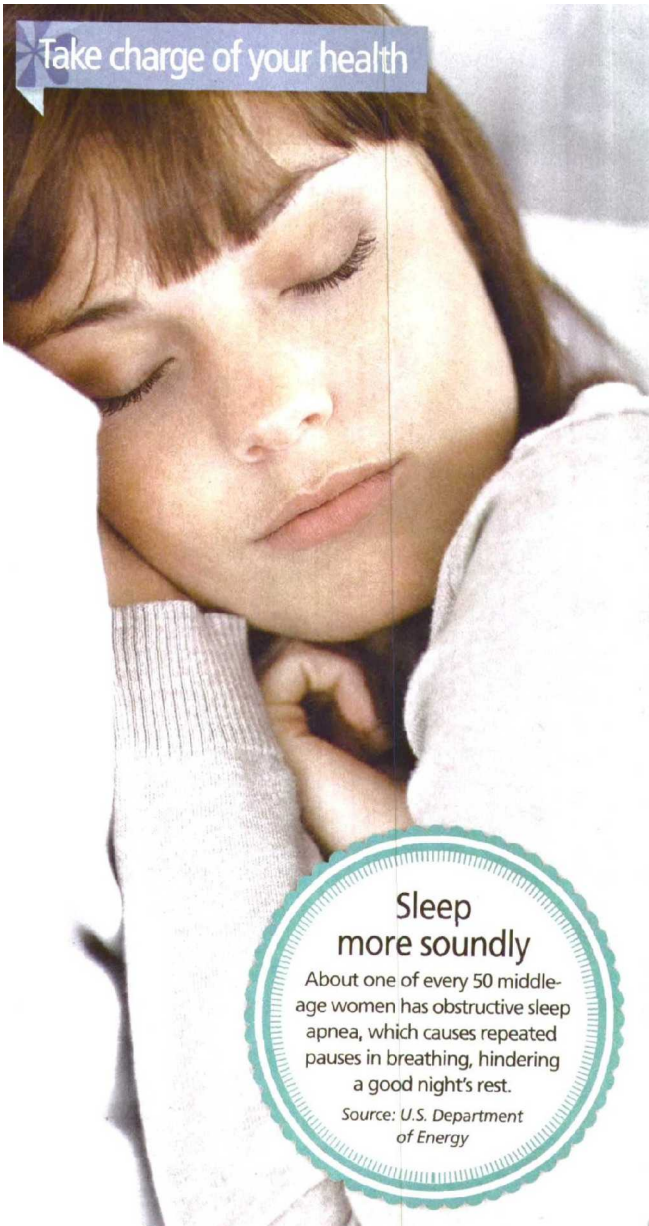
Forty-three percent of Americans use caffeine to perk up. But watch out: Since half the caffeine you consume is still in your system six hours later, you could develop insomnia and deepen your fatigue.

Source: The National Sleep Foundation

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Sleep more soundly
About one of every 50 middle-age women has obstructive sleep apnea, which causes repeated pauses in breathing, hindering a good night's rest.
Source: U.S. Department of Energy

*** Lupus**

Fatigue affects as many as 80 percent of people with this autoimmune disease, which can damage the skin, joints and organs. The Lupus Foundation of America estimates that at least 1.5 million Americans have a form of the condition, but many don't know it; the symptoms mimic those of diabetes and other disorders.

- **Other symptoms:** fever; headaches; painful or swollen joints; anemia; butterfly-shaped rash on face; swelling in feet, legs, hands or around the eyes
- **How to get a diagnosis:** Have a physical and ask the doctor to perform tests.
- **What can help:** medications such as anti-inflammatories, antimalarials or corticosteroids

*** Hypothyroidism**

One in 10 women older than 50 has the condition, and about half don't know it, the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists says. This deficit slows your organs, wearing you out.

- **Other symptoms:** weight gain or difficulty losing weight; coarse, dry hair or hair loss; dry, rough skin; constipation
- **How to get a diagnosis:** Ask your doctor for a blood test that measures thyroid levels.
- **What can help:** a prescription synthetic thyroid hormone pill

*** Fibromyalgia**

Although its main symptom is pain, almost all 5 million American adults with fibromyalgia (the cause of which is unknown) have fatigue and sleep problems.

- **Other symptoms:** morning stiffness, headaches, tingling or numbness in hands or feet, painful periods
- **How to get a diagnosis:** See a doctor if you have had widespread pain for at least three months, especially pain and achiness in at least 11 of 18 tender-point sites such as the neck, between the shoulder blades, lower back and elbows.
- **What can help:** low-intensity exercise such as yoga or riding a bike, pain medication or antidepressants

*** Diabetes**

According to the American Diabetes Association, more than 12 million women (about one in 10) have this condition, which occurs because the body doesn't produce or use insulin, leading to high blood-glucose levels. Glucose is your body's main source of energy, so when it can't get into your muscle cells, you feel run-down.

- **Other symptoms:** excessive thirst, frequent urination, hunger, blurred vision
- **How to get a diagnosis:** Request an A1C blood test, which measures average blood glucose over a period of up to three months. The higher your A1C level, the less you are in control of your diabetes.
- **What can help:** Studies show that moderate exercise can lower blood-sugar levels. Build up to moderate-intensity cardio 2½ hours per week and resistance training three times a week. Also, choose your foods carefully: Complex carbs such as brown rice and whole-grain bread help keep blood sugar—and energy levels—steady.



Could it be adrenal fatigue?
Many natural-health practitioners say they suspect that for some women who are constantly under a lot of stress, this condition is the culprit.

If you're always feeling worn out, you might be taxing your adrenal glands, which produce the hormones that help handle stress. The overuse might deplete the gland, causing fatigue, hypoglycemia and irritability when hungry, low blood pressure and dizziness when standing and recurrent infections. (Consult a holistic doctor if you suspect you have the condition.) To combat it, stabilize your hormones. Here are a few ways to get back in balance:

- **Graze.** Eat six small meals a day that are high in protein and low in simple carbs. (Choose whole grains over white flour.)
- **Reduce sugar intake.** Nix soda and cut back on cookies, desserts and processed products with added sugar. Eat one or two whole fruits a day.
- **Exercise if you can.** If the activity feels too tiring, keep your heart rate below 90 as you work out.
- **Add a dash of salt.** Adrenal fatigue can mean you get too little of the mineral.

TOP: FROM LEFT: MOMENT/GETTY IMAGES, ISTOCKPHOTO



Perk up in a hurry! Pressed for time? Try one (or all) of these revitalizing tips.

IF YOU HAVE
1
MINUTE

✿ **Chew cinnamon gum.** People who chewed gum while multitasking were more

alert than non-gum chewers by nearly 19 percent when under mild stress and 8 percent when under moderate stress, according to a study published in the *International Society of Behavioral Medicine*. Choose cinnamon flavor: The scent helped people stay more awake and less frustrated while driving, according to a Wheeling Jesuit University study. Cinnamon increases brain blood flow and stimulates the

area of the brain responsible for arousal.

✿ **Awake to light.** Replace a blaring alarm clock with one that wakes you up with soothing gradual light such as the Verilux Rise and Shine Wakeup light (\$100; amazon.com). Or as soon as you're upright, turn on a lamp or open your shades. Light signals the body to stop producing melatonin (a hormone that acts as the body's natural snooze button) and resets your internal biological clock, keeping a bounce in your step all day.

✿ **Swish an energy drink.** To get the benefits of an energy

drink without the calories, take a swig and spit it out, says a study published in the *Journal of Physiology*. Researchers looked at the brains of athletes who only swished energy drinks and found that teasing their palates with a carbohydrate activated the reward and pleasure regions in the brain. The result? The athletes worked out harder because their brains were tricked into thinking the body would get more fuel.

✿ **Dab on a little jasmine.** Adults who rubbed jasmine oil on their stomachs rated themselves more alert than those who used a placebo, says a study published in the journal *Natural Product*

Communications, which researches alternative remedies. The natural scent stimulates the release of noradrenaline, a neurotransmitter that increases alertness. Mix jasmine oil into an unscented body lotion and apply it as you would your regular moisturizer.

✿ **Use the power of flowers.** Keep a bouquet of buds in your kitchen or at your desk at work, or take walks in your garden. People who look at fresh flowers in the morning feel more enthusiastic and energetic the rest of the day, according to a Harvard Medical School study.



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: GRADY REESE/GETTY IMAGES; ISTOCKPHOTO (4)

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Eat for energy

Invigorate yourself with three antifatigue foods.

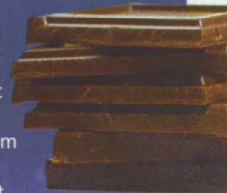
ORANGE

The smell of this freshly peeled fruit is sure to wake you up, but there's another good reason to make it one of your go-to snacks: Studies show vitamin C helps your body turn fat into energy.



CHOCOLATE

Bite into an ounce of the dark variety (one that is at least 60 percent cocoa). You'll get a jolt from the theobromine, a natural stimulant.



FISH

Omega-3s can boost a brain chemical that can positively affect mood, according to preliminary studies. Eat fatty fish such as salmon three times a week, or pop a daily 1,000-milligram DHA supplement.



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IF YOU HAVE
5
MINUTES

✿ Enjoy a break by the water. Experts in the United Kingdom found that walking or biking outdoors is better at cutting fatigue, anger and sadness than using a treadmill or a stationary bike. Benefits are even greater if the activity takes place near water.

✿ Sip some tea. Coffee is known as a pick-me-up, but tea is a good alternative, according to a study published in the journal *Appetite*, which studies people's food and drink choices. Volunteers drank either black tea or a tealike placebo. The real-tea drinkers reported feeling more alert and did twice as well on a test that measured the ability to plan and make decisions.



Researchers attribute the boost to the tea's caffeine and L-theanine, which activates alpha brain waves associated with energy.

✿ Snack on nuts. They're packed with protein, which increases dopamine, a brain chemical that helps you feel awake.

✿ Just say no. Confidently asserting yourself in a direct, nonaggressive way can both invigorate and empower you.



Take charge of your health

Consider the big picture
Forget what you *should* do and focus on what you *want* to do. What excites you? Set your mind to doing that. Being true to yourself is one of the most energizing things you can do.



Make it a cold one. A glass of water, that is. Fatigue can be a sign of dehydration. Check your mouth and lips. Dry? Time to drink up.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: CHEV WILKINSON/GETTY IMAGES; ISTOCKPHOTO; MASTERFILE/ROTHLITZ/PHOTOFEST; ISTOCKPHOTO (2)

IF YOU HAVE
20
MINUTES

✿ Exercise easily. A study done at the University of Georgia found that when adults suffering from persistent fatigue biked at a low intensity for 20 minutes, three times a week, they felt 65 percent less fatigued after six weeks than a couch-potato group. The results were even better than for those who did moderate-intensity

exercise and similar to the effects of using prescription drugs, like amphetamines.

✿ Grasp the gratitude. Write down everything you're thankful for, such as the neighbor who helped you weed your garden, the fact that strawberries are in season and the way your puppy snuggles up to you every night. Studies show cultivating a sense of gratitude can help you sleep better and increase your energy.

✿ Fill up on fiber. In a study published in *Appetite*, people ate either high-fiber bran cereals or low-fiber corn- or rice-based cereal every morning for two weeks. At the end of the study, those who ate the most fiber reported feeling the most energetic. Researchers theorize that the body digests high-fiber cereal slowly, keeping blood-sugar levels steady.



Sources: Alexandra Barzvi, PhD, clinical assistant professor of psychology at NYU Medical Center; Christine Gerbstadt, MD, spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association; Elizabeth Mayer-Davis, RD, president of Health Care and Education for the American Diabetes Association; Norman Rosenthal, MD, clinical professor of psychiatry, Georgetown University School of Medicine, and author of *Winter Blues*; Lauren Slayton, RD, director of Foodtrainers in New York City; Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, medical director of the national Fibromyalgia and Fatigue Centers and author of *From Fatigued to Fantastic!*; Joel Zonszein, MD, endocrinologist and director of the Clinical Diabetes Center at Montefiore Medical Center in New York City