



# The Energy Factor



Energy ...a great word, but do you have enough of it? Energy means different things to different people. It can mean being positive, alert, feeling good, enthusiastic, motivated, having zest for life and raring to go. Energy is essential for good health to nourish our bodies and minds. We need to have sufficient stores of energy to not only feel good, but also achieve what we want to achieve and enjoy each day to the full. So, if you want to achieve consistently high energy levels and feel great, read on for some tips and ideas. **by Gillian Burn**

**T**o be energetic you need sufficient fuel from food and water, adequate sleep and rest, a healthy environment around you, sufficient exercise and activity, variety and challenge in your work and play and supportive people around you. Some of these energy factors will be addressed in this and subsequent health articles.

Firstly, we need to understand what may take our energy away. Energy zappers may include the time of the day (e.g. early afternoon), seasons (winter), late nights, stress, other peo-

ple, constant change, illness, external pressures, personal issues, as well as juggling the many demands from family and work life each day.

Every day our energy levels are affected by our natural body clock and biorhythms. The body clock relates to times of the day that you may feel more like doing certain activities. Some of us are at our best in the morning and others prefer to work late into the night.

Our bodies have natural 'highs' and 'lows' during the day, which are also linked to the action of hormones (adrenaline) and temperature control. The natural body clock is triggered from the hypothalamus in the brain in response to light and is genetically determined. Timings vary between people and depend on a variety of factors including the month, moon cycle and season. It affects our physical, emotional and intellectual performance.

When the body temperature level is higher, our adrenaline and energy levels are also higher. For most people this is often around 10 - 11am, 3 - 5pm and between 5 - 7pm. This is when it is easier to learn new skills, co-ordination and stamina are improved and it is a good time to exercise. Strenuous sports are best done in the early evening when our muscles are warmer and more flexible. Gentle stretching and flexibility exercises can be done in the early morning e.g. walking, yoga or pilates.

Consider your own body clock and whether you would describe yourself as a morning person (lark), or an evening person (owl). About 10% of people are early morning larks and about 10% evening owls. Try to schedule your daily tasks or projects around your optimum times of the day.

Whilst understanding our body clock and energy times of the day, it is also useful to be aware of the mind/body connection. There is a saying from Schiller, which states 'it is the mind itself, which builds the body'. How you feel in your mind will affect how energetic you feel and how you react to certain situations. As our lives are usually very busy, you may want to try the following exercise to



help unlock the endorphins or happy hormones around the body. Endorphins are produced naturally in the body and can create a sense of well-being and pleasure. They are also important to heal wounds and boost the immune system. You can create endorphins during a busy day by using the following simple steps:

- Start by considering all the positive triggers in your life e.g. favourite places you have visited on holiday, a beautiful beach, a lovely garden, a special piece of music, family and friends, important memories of key events, animals or pets, certain hobbies etc. Decide which ones to create into a positive memory bank where you can really imagine the scene or experience feelings of relaxation and happiness that accompany them.
- Then pause and enjoy the memories for a few moments as you take a few deep breaths.
- As you pause you are allowing the positive feelings and endorphins to flow through your body.
- During your busy day, you can press the imaginary 'pause' button and recall some of the positive triggers from your memory bank. Taking a few slow, deep breaths can help recharge you and provide a precious moment of calm in a busy day.

Creating energy during the day is also linked to how well you sleep at night. We spend about a 1/3rd of our lives

asleep and most of us need between 6 - 8 hours' sleep to be alert and effective throughout the day. Sleep is also an important time for the body to have a deep rest and for our cells to recharge and assimilate information from the day. During sleep our physical energy is renewed and the growth hormones repair and rebuild cells and tissues. Muscular energy is replenished and the immune system works to combat illness.

Our sleeping pattern will be affected by sedentary behaviour, lack of a regular sleep pattern and the use of stimulants e.g. coffee, alcohol or nicotine. Consider the following sleeping tips to give you a good night's sleep:

- Establish a bedtime routine with regular times for going to bed and getting up.
- Get up at around the same time every day. If you lie in on days off it can often disrupt your sleep pattern and make you more tired during the day. An afternoon siesta is a better option for the body on your days off!
- Make your bedroom as quiet and relaxing as possible, avoiding bright lights and lots of noise.
- Don't go to bed hungry - have some fruit in the evening or a light snack instead, but avoid sugary, spicy or fatty foods.
- Avoid caffeine in teas, coffee, chocolate and colas late at night. Try some herb teas instead.
- Consider relaxation techniques.
- Early evening exercise helps as the body temperature rises during exercise and later falls making it easier to sleep. Allow 2 - 3 hours between strenuous exercise and sleep.

Choose which energy tips you will try to keep you recharged throughout the day and ready to enjoy a good night's sleep! **TEX**



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