

# Energy Fuel

The food we eat provides the energy we need throughout the day. In this article, we will explore the different food groups that provide sustained energy and describe which foods stimulate our brain and relieve stress. We will also consider some healthy alternatives when we have a snack attack in school or feel we need to grab that extra cup of coffee! By **Gillian Burn**



**W**hat we eat has a huge impact on how we feel each day and the level of energy we have. Having a variety of foods will help ensure we maintain the level of protein, carbohydrates and fats we need each day. The morning is a key time to restore energy levels. This is the time we need to replace the glucose level in our body to enhance learning, memory and thinking. We need to 'break the fast' and make sure we have some breakfast whether we choose cereal, toast or fruit juice. One of the best energy foods is oats, such as muesli or porridge. Oats are easy to digest and are good for brain function and the nervous system. Oats help remove cholesterol from the digestive track and arteries, and strengthen cardiac muscles. They are rich in silicon, which helps renew bones and connective tissue. If your morning is always too rushed and you often miss breakfast before heading to school, make sure you eat some fruit instead. Fruit can be digested in 20 minutes and it provides energy very quickly.

During morning break time, you

may be tempted to dive for a chocolate bar or plate of biscuits. Not the healthiest of options as these snacks only provide a quick burst of sugar, which is followed rapidly by a feeling of hunger. Healthier snacks provide more sustained energy stores for the body, making you feel full for longer. Healthier snacks include seasonal fruits e.g. apples, pears, grapes, bananas. Some oat based energy bars can also provide a healthier alternative, but read the labels to watch the sugar content. Fruit is easier to digest alone and, as it is digested very quickly, it provides quick and lasting energy stores. It is an ideal snack for mid-morning or afternoon. Other alternatives include dried fruit and nuts, which have the added benefit of stimulating the brain.

If you are running a meeting, try taking in a plate of grapes instead of biscuits and you will be surprised how quickly they are eaten! During an INSET day, again consider providing a bowl of fruit. You can also provide dried fruit and nuts as a healthy snack alternative. All



these snacks are easily available in the local supermarket to keep the costs down. If you

are arranging a gift for a member of staff or prize at school, you may want to send a basket of fruit instead of flowers as a healthy alternative. The company First 4 Fruit provide exclusive fruit hampers ([www.first4fruit.com](http://www.first4fruit.com) or tel. 0870 011 0673).

What we drink throughout the day will also affect our energy levels significantly. We need at least 2 litres of water daily to replace normal body fluids. Within the hypothalamus area of our brain is where the regulation of thirst and appetite takes place. Whilst the two sensations are controlled separately, we often think we are hungry when in fact we are thirsty. When you are feeling hungry, having a glass of water first can often disperse the so-called hunger pangs. A high intake of water will help to maintain energy levels and prevent headaches. For every 1% loss of water around the body cells, the body has a corresponding drop in

## TOP 10 ENERGY FUEL TIPS

1. Break the fast at breakfast to restore your glucose levels
2. Drink 8 - 10 glasses of water daily
3. Eat plenty of fruit as a healthy snack alternative to provide a quick source of energy
4. Remember to include nuts and seeds as a good energy tonic
5. Try oat-based energy bars for snacks; oats improve brain function
6. Take a bowl of fruit to a meeting instead of biscuits or doughnuts
7. Try a protein power lunch to stimulate clear thinking in the afternoon
8. Eat lots of dark green vegetables e.g. broccoli, spinach
9. Include plenty of brown rice, wholemeal products and grains to promote brain function and energy
10. Eat regularly and take time to eat

energy levels of 10%; so next time you are tired or hungry, reach for a glass of water first. Remember, the brain is made up of 75 – 80% water and needs to be fully hydrated to function optimally. Water with lemon juice and 1/2 teaspoon of honey is also a great tonic for the liver; it cleanses the body and kick-starts it into action. It is good early in the morning, or if you are suffering after too much drinking or over eating!

Drinking tea and coffee is fine in moderation (approx. three to four cups a day), but be aware of the effect that caffeine may have on our bodies. Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, chocolate, cocoa and soft drinks. Caffeine:

- Affects the balance of insulin and blood sugar;
  - Causes a quick rise in blood sugar; the body uses that blood sugar for energy, instead of using stored fat as an energy source;
  - Contains some substances which may cause us to age more quickly;
  - Encourages calcium to be taken from our bones, reducing our bone health;
  - Can cause anxiety, nervousness, moodiness and sleep problems.
- Healthier drinks include herb teas



and green tea. These contain high levels of vitamins, minerals and help to remove toxins. They also help protect the heart and lower blood pressure. If you are trying green or herb tea for the first time, keep the drink quite weak until you are happy with the different taste.

Certain foods have been found to boost brain function and mental ability. Good brain foods include vegetables, fruit, unrefined carbohydrates, lean meat, poultry, pulses and fish. Oily fish contains the Omega 3 fatty acids essential for mental performance.

Vitamins and minerals are required for healthy growth and function of the brain and to provide energy. Maintain a high intake of fruit (apricots, apples, bananas, blackcurrants or berries), vegetables (carrots, broccoli), salads (beetroot and celery) and nuts and seeds (almonds, pumpkin, sunflower and sprouted seeds).

Carbohydrates are broken down in the digestion process to create energy. Include rice, grains and pulses and keep to the unrefined varieties e.g. brown or basmati rice, multigrain or rye bread. Carbohydrate is easier for the body to digest separately from protein, so if you need to be really alert in the afternoon, keep your lunch to

protein and salad or non-starchy vegetables. Leave the carbohydrates till later in the day. Make sure you eat something for lunch, even though you may not have long to stop between meetings and activities. Fruit will provide a good source of energy quickly, dried nuts provide a good protein snack and energy bars containing seeds, nuts or cereals provide an energy burst. Oat cakes and rice cakes are a good snack to keep in the staff room or handy in your bag if you don't have time to stop for lunch.

If you are having a stressful day, avoid the acid-forming foods (coffee, cakes, biscuits, carbonated drinks, sweet and processed foods). Focus more on alkaline-based foods including fruits and vegetables. Celery helps to calm the nerves, and broccoli and green vegetables are high in magnesium, the anti-stress mineral.

Regular exercise helps increase oxygen circulation around the body to keep your mind and body alert. Watch out for the next article for tips on exercise at school. **TEX**

**Gillian Burn (Director of Health Circles Ltd) provides training and consultancy services focusing on improving health and quality of life for individuals and companies nationwide. Her programmes focus on creating energy through mind and body health. Gillian has a clinical background and a masters degree in exercise and health. She is a master practitioner in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), Time Line Therapy®, and teaches pilates exercise. She is the author of the Energy & Well-Being Pocketbook published by Management Pocketbooks. She can be contacted on 01628 666 069 and via [www.healthcircles.co.uk](http://www.healthcircles.co.uk)**



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