Increase energy with exercise

If you pay attention to advertisements and the store shelves, it seems like everyone in today’s world must be tired…after all, there’s no shortage of super vitamins, other tablets, tonics and drinks that claim to boost your energy. Even kids, who should have plenty of energy, use various energy drinks as options for breakfast, a mid-day pick-me-up or to stay awake late into the evening.

But if you find yourself exhausted by the end of the day, or struggle to stay awake at work in the afternoon, instead of reaching for a product to invigorate you, a brisk walk may be just the “prescription” needed.

In fact, the link between physical fitness and energy is so strong, that doctors have been prescribing exercise for treatment of chronic fatigue, depression, seasonal affective disorder (SAD) and insomnia. So just imagine if people who suffer from these most stubborn types of fatigue can be energized with exercise, what exercise can do for people who experience ordinary, everyday fatigue (Supercharge Your Energy Levels Through Exercise, www.ezinearticles.com).

Of course, establishing a regular fitness routine is ideal, but even a few minutes a day of exercise can change your level of energy and how you feel throughout the day. The key is making the choice to do something physical, despite feeling fatigued. Obviously, it’s harder to put on tennis shoes and take a walk when you’re already feeling tired, but it is the best thing you can do to alleviate fatigue (Exercise Increases Energy and Fights Fatigue, www.about.com).

How does exercise combat fatigue?

Your brain thrives on oxygen. Blood transports oxygen to the brain, so the greater the blood flow to the brain, the greater the oxygen supply the brain has. As you increase your heartbeat with a vigorous workout, more blood surges through the brain, more oxygen gets absorbed by your brain cells, and you feel more mentally alert and energetic.

Experts point out another long-term cause-and-effect relationship between exercise and blood flow to the brain; as you continue exercis-

ing, the number of capillaries (small blood vessels between your arteries and veins) throughout your body will grow. More blood flow through your “pipes” means more oxygen will be supplied where you need it.

Blood also carries glucose, the simple sugar that’s the primary fuel source for your entire nervous system of which the brain is the command center. Glucose’s production starts the metabolism of carbohydrates. Various enzymes, plus your body’s ability to use glucose to produce ATP, the more important energy chemical in the body, control this production. When you exercise, you increase the level of those enzymes and their activity.

In other words, when you exercise regularly, you boost your enzymes, resulting in more glucose, and your body is more efficient in using the glucose. You get a larger supply of ATP, which helps fight off energy drop (Supercharge Your Energy Levels Through Exercise, www.ezinearticles.com).

Two easy tips for getting started

**Stretch regularly.** Stretching is beneficial to your energy levels because it helps maintain blood flow by reducing clogging of the arteries. The more freely blood flows, the more energy you’re likely to have.

**Get cardiovascular exercise.** You don’t have to go to a gym to get cardiovascular exercise—try walking, jogging, using the stairs or a treadmill. Cardiovascular exercise will help lower blood pressure, decrease body fat, reduce cholesterol, relieve stress and increase energy levels.

**Did you know that you can consult with a dietitian and/or fitness coach through your EASE@Work employee assistance program benefit? Go to www.easeatwork.com/EASEy with your company user name and password, then click on the links to the Nutritional Coaching, Fitness Coaching and Health & Wellness sections for more information about implementing lifestyle change. Call us at 216/241-3273 or 800/521-3273 for assistance or to schedule your confidential coaching session.**
Our obese youth

Diabetes, hypertension and other obesity related chronic diseases that were previously most prevalent among adults, have become more common in children. The percentage of children and adolescents who are overweight and obese is now higher than ever before. In fact, the obesity rate in these age groups has quadrupled over the past 25 years in both girls and boys alike.

Poor dietary habits and inactivity are reported to contribute to the increase in obesity in youth. And, today’s youth are considered to be the most inactive generation in history. It is believed this is caused in part by reductions in school physical education programs and unavailable, or unsafe, community recreational facilities.

source: Center for Disease Control (CDC)

Up & off the couch with your children

Next time you’re looking for something to do with your children, instead of popping in a DVD or going to the movies, consider an activity that will boost your moving quotient.

Walking

Tour a neighborhood on foot, go exploring in a park or nearby public woods. Stretch your muscles, burn calories and explore new sights together.

Wheels & blades

Bicycling, roller-blading/skating, ice skating, skateboarding, non-electric scooters…these are all activities that adults and children alike can enjoy together. Be sure to observe rules about what equipment is permitted in specific areas. Wear protective gear such as knee and elbow pads and wrist guards.

Swimming

Water sports offer great fitness and fun activities for families. Follow safety precautions, including never leaving young children alone in or near any type of water feature.

Dancing

While some adults wouldn’t consider this an activity to share with their children, some types of dancing are easy and fun for kids to learn—such as folk or square dancing. And, it’s also easy to put on your favorite fast-moving tunes and just have a dance party around the house.

Other activities to consider:

• bowling
• miniature golf
• kite flying
• walking the dog
• jump-robe competitions
• skiing/snowboarding
• batting cages
• informal sports scrimmages, such as football, volleyball, etc.

Our attitudes affect our children—so stay positive!

• First graders are already making distinctions between those who are overweight and those who aren’t, says Doug Bunnell, Ph.D, and expert in eating disorders.
• Kids are also exposed to stereotypes that overweight people aren’t as smart or as good.

Parents should also avoid making negative comments about their own bodies and those of other people.

• “For teenage girls especially,” explains Bunnell, “Comments about weight and shape can have an enormous impact. In particular, dad’s comments can have a special power around girls who are going through puberty.”

Put health first!

• Always use health, not weight-loss, as the reason to grab an apple rather than a bag of chips.
• Focus on eating a wide variety of healthy foods, and eating only when you’re hungry (rather than when you’re tired or upset).
• Remind your children that healthy eating means feeling better.

from “Obtaining and Maintaining a Positive Body Image,” an Ease@Work seminar program.
Daily physical activity helps lessen the severity of arthritis

More than 46 million people of all ages in the U.S. have arthritis. A recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that arthritis is the nation’s most common disability.

The same CDC study showed that the number of people who report arthritis as their primary cause of disability has grown by more than 3 million since 1999. What’s more alarming—with the aging of baby boomers, the prevalence of arthritis is expected to increase 40 percent by the year 2030.

Given the pervasiveness of arthritis, many Americans understand that it is a serious health problem. However, some are unaware that physical activity can actually help lessen the severity of arthritis. In fact, increased daily movement or exercise is one of the best approaches to helping reduce stiff, achy joints caused by arthritis.

“Physical activity, including stretching and strengthening, is crucial to improving joint pain and mobility and reducing fatigue often associated with arthritis,” says Dr. Patience White, chief public health officer for the Arthritis Foundation. “Moving just 30 minutes daily, even 10 to 15 minutes at a time, can reduce the impact of arthritis on a person’s daily activities and help to prevent developing more painful arthritis.”

The Arthritis Foundation has created a program, Let’s Move Together, which is designed to inspire people to move every day to prevent or treat arthritis. Its Web site offers helpful tips for increasing movement, including:

**Take a hike.** Walking is one of the easiest, safest and most beneficial forms of exercise. It helps keep your weight in check and strengthens muscles, which reduces pressure on the knees and decreases pain. Walking just fast enough so that you’re slightly short of breath is a good pace. The goal is to strengthen the muscles in your legs and around your knees and hips.

**Go for a spin.** Stationary cycling strengthens your heart, hips and knees -- with less impact on joints than other forms of cardiovascular exercise, such as running. For those new to stationary cycling, start slowly with a five-minute session at a comfortable pace three times per day.

**Make a splash.** Using a combination of soothing warm water and gentle movements helps increase joint flexibility and range of motion. Studies have shown aquatic-based exercise helps to restore and maintain muscle strength, relieve pain and stiffness and provide a community support system for people with arthritis. Those looking to get started can explore the Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program, which is offered in most major cities.

**Go with the flow.** Tai chi is a noncompetitive, self-paced system of gentle physical exercise and stretching. Participants in a tai chi program follow a series of postures or movements in a slow, graceful manner. Each posture flows into the next without pausing. Experts agree that tai chi may improve mobility, breathing and relaxation. Plus, the movements don’t require deep bending or squatting, which makes it easier and more comfortable to learn.

“Without regular exercise, muscles become smaller and weaker, and weakness and weight gain from inactivity puts stress on weight-bearing joints such as the hips, knees and ankles,” says White. “Aerobic walking and other exercise programs can make a significant impact on thwarting arthritis while also improving a person’s overall well-being.”

More information on the benefits of daily movement can be found online at www.letsmovetogether.org.
GET FIT!

If you don’t already have an exercise plan, just getting started may be what’s holding you back. Too often it’s easy to make excuses for not exercising or skipping a workout. It may not be easy making exercise a habit, but it doesn’t need to be complicated either. What it does require is that you make physical activity a priority in your life.

Excuses

• **It’s boring.** Find an activity that you like—that you will look forward to.

• **So what does it matter if I skip one workout?** It’s easy to let time slip by, until you wake up one morning and realize it’s been a month since you last exercised…and you’re starting from scratch again.

• **Things are too hectic right now at work, home, etc.** Life doesn’t calm down and you will always have responsibilities and obligations. Find a way to exercise and make time for your well-being now.

• **I don’t feel driven to keep exercising.** You may never “fall in love” with exercising, but just keep doing it. It’s like hygiene for the body—you wouldn’t think twice of not brushing your teeth or combing your hair, but you still do it.

• **I’m not seeing results—why do I even bother?** Results take time. Focus on the benefits now—stress reduction, higher energy levels, better sleep, etc.

• **I don’t have an hour to spend at the gym everyday.** Great, because you don’t need an hour. Accumulate 10–15 minutes of activity a couple of times a day and you’ve got an exercise program.

Reasons to say ‘Yes’ to exercise

• **Personal satisfaction.** Admit it. It feels good when you finish a workout—you feel confident and you’ve followed through on a commitment to yourself.

• **Relaxation.** A good workout will energize you, but also provide stress relief.

• **Weight loss/toning your body.** A nice side benefit, right?

• **Better overall health.** Regular physical activity helps decrease high blood pressure, high cholesterol, can eliminate diabetes and other conditions related to being overweight.

• **Confidence.** Exercising makes you more flexible, more agile and ultimately, more comfortable in your own skin.

Do you need help getting started with a fitness program? Call Ease@Work for confidential, one-on-one FitIn@Work coaching at 216/241-3273 or 800/521-3273, or go to www.easeatwork.com/EASEy with your organization’s user name and password.

Exercise Your Way to Better Sleep

Want to get better sleep? Then try revving up your activity during the day.

Researchers at Stanford University School of Medicine studied the effects of exercise on sleep patterns and have discovered that adults who exercise for 20-30 minutes every other day reduce the length of time it takes to fall asleep at night, and that physical activity also increases the amount of time spent in the deepest stage of sleep.

Incorporate a moderate activity—such as walking, low-impact aerobics, stationary cycling, jumping rope, swimming, jogging—into your morning or afternoon routine; avoid exercising close to bedtime.

Remember to cool down after exercise with some stretching—gentle dancing or yoga are good ways to end an exercise session.

Benefits of exercise include:

• Reduction of stress by helping dissipate the lactic acid that builds up in the blood

• Eases muscular tension

• Sharpens the brain by increasing the amount of oxygen available

• Strengthens and stimulates the heart and lungs

• Vitalizes the nervous system

• Activates the endocrine system, which regulates hormones

• Increases the production of endorphins—a hormone that creates a sense of well-being, happiness and excitement

• Reduces boredom, worry and tension

• Improves sleep by physically stressing the body, which in turn the brain compensates for by increasing deep sleep

Get fit!

Exercise Your Way to Better Sleep
Stuffed Shells in Jalapeno Tomato Sauce

A well-seasoned main dish pasta sure to please both family and dinner guests. Minus the sauce, the shells can be prepared in advance and chilled or even frozen for up to one week; and held until final preparation is desired.

**Ingredients:**

- Vegetable cooking spray
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 fresh jalapeno pepper, stemmed and minced
- 1 can (28 oz.) salt-free Italian peeled tomatoes, crushed with their juice
- 1 lb. (16 oz.) Mozzarella cheese, part-skim, shredded
- 8 oz. low-fat dry curd cottage cheese
- 1 package (10 oz.) frozen chopped spinach, thawed, drained and squeezed dry
- 1/2 cup evaporated skim milk
- 2 egg whites
- 2 cups fresh basil (packed), minced
- Freshly ground pepper
- 8 oz. large pasta shells
- 2 t. bread crumbs

**Directions:**

1. In a medium saucepan over medium-low heat, coat the bottom of the pan with a vegetable cooking spray. Add onions, garlic and jalapeno pepper; cover and cook for about 15 minutes over medium-low heat, until the onion is hot and translucent, stirring occasionally.

2. Add the tomatoes with their juice. Bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce heat to low, and cook partially covered; stirring occasionally for about 30 minutes. Uncover and continue to cook for about 25 to 30 minutes until the tomato sauce is reduced by about one-third in size. Let cool slightly.

3. Transfer the sauce to a food processor and puree until smooth. (Can be prepared up to 3 days ahead. Remember to cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate.)

4. In a medium saucepan, mash together Mozzarella cheese and dry curd cottage cheese. Stir in spinach, evaporated skim milk, egg whites and basil. Season with pepper. (Can be prepared up to 24 hours ahead.)

5. In a large pot of boiling water, cook the pasta shells about 12 minutes, stirring occasionally, until al dente. Drain.

6. Preheat oven to 400°. Spoon 1 cup of tomato sauce over the bottom of a large shallow baking dish (13” x 9”). Stuff each shell with about 1 heaping tablespoon of the filling and place in baking dish, filling side up. Drizzle the remaining tomato sauce evenly over the shells.

7. Sprinkle bread crumbs over the tomato sauce. Bake in the upper third (high rack) of the oven for 30 to 40 minutes, until the sauce is bubbling, the top is lightly browned and the filling is heated through. Let the pasta cool for about 10 minutes before serving.

**Serves 8:** 248 Calories Per Serving

_recipe courtesy of Karin Palmer, RD, LD, CDE, contracted Ease@Work dietitian._