

Health & Wellness  
Special

## Are you running low on energy?

Bring that zing back into your life — caffeine not needed

BY MELODY CHONG

Did you wake up this morning feeling like you've not slept? Do you keep yawning at meetings? We often blame that sense of tiredness on having too many things to juggle: Work, family, personal and social commitments. But it could well be your habits that are sapping you of energy.

For instance, not drinking enough water can leave you feeling drained, as can snacking on oily food like goreng pisang and fried fish balls. Even your everyday routine can have an effect on your energy level.

Find out how to bring the zing back into your life without resorting to coffee. We ask a few health experts how they keep their energy levels up despite their hectic schedules.



Bring your energised self back without resorting to caffeine fixes. (PHOTO: SHUTTER)



Jaclyn Reutens,  
dietitian,  
Aptima Nutrition &  
Sports Consultants

#### WATCH WHEN AND WHAT YOU EAT

• **Eat regular meals even when you're not hungry**  
Circumstances can suppress or increase your appetite, said Jaclyn.

For example, when you are stressed, you might not feel like eating. Then, if you skip a meal, you will experience an energy dip, feel hungry and end up snacking on unhealthy snacks, such as sweets, tidbits and sugary drinks, she said.

#### • Avoid fat

Jaclyn avoids food like doughnuts, curry

puffs and fried fish balls. "Fat takes a long time to digest and makes you feel sluggish," she said.

#### • Tap on the power of fruits, vegetables and whole grains

Hunger pangs can cause you to snack on unhealthy food, so fill up on fruits and vegetables, such as apples, grapes, carrots, celery and spinach. Whole grains or wholemeal foods that release energy slowly when digested are also good choices, she said. Below are examples of what Jaclyn eats on a typical day:

- **Breakfast:** High-fibre cereal with low-fat milk
- **Lunch:** Wholemeal wrap with roast chicken and vegetables
- **Dinner:** Brown rice with pan-fried fish and vegetables
- **Snack:** Fruits or low-fat yogurt



See Wee Jie,  
personal fitness  
instructor, EQUIP

#### BALANCE EXERCISE WITH REST

#### • Exercise for energy

A simple energising workout can include exercises like running on the spot, wall squats, kneeling push-ups, skipping rope, planking and tricep dips.

"In 30 seconds, do as many repetitions as you can for each exercise. Rest for 10 seconds, then move on to the next exercise," said Wee Jie.

One set includes completing all six exercises. He recommended aiming for three to five sets (with a three- to five-minute rest in between sets) of the workout.

#### • Get enough sleep — somehow

"Our mind gets tired because of overwhelming work. Our body tenses up when we're stressed, draining us quickly of energy," said Wee Jie. You'll need at least seven hours of sleep for your body to repair and recuperate, he said. On days when this father of a newborn isn't able to get a good night's sleep, he takes power naps.

#### • Exercise for sleep

Wee Jie recommends stretching exercises like yoga and pilates. "These exercises help to stretch your body and relax your muscles," he said. Put on soothing music as you stretch to help you calm your mind too. What to avoid: Vigorous exercise, like running, one to two hours before bedtime. It can elevate your adrenaline levels and leave you wide awake in bed instead.



Dr Melvin Look,  
consultant  
general surgeon,  
PanAsia Surgery  
Group

#### HYDRATE YOURSELF

#### • Don't get dehydrated

"Studies on human performance show that even a loss of just 1.5 per cent of our body's normal water volume can adversely affect how our minds and bodies function," said Dr Look.

"Dehydration affects the volume of our circulatory system and its ability to deliver oxygenated blood to our muscles and organs. Our brains also detect dehydration and emit signals that may affect our moods," he said.

#### • Plain water is best

"It is amazing how you will feel better and more energised just by drinking plenty of water throughout the day," said Dr Look.

Fruit juices and soups are good choices too, but avoid alcohol, carbonated drinks and beverages with high-sugar content.

#### • Aim for at least 1.6 to 2 litres

Just how much water do we have to drink a day? Men need at least two litres, while women, 1.6 litres — even when they have sedentary lifestyles. According to Dr Look, a good indicator of your hydration status is the colour of your urine. "A good output of straw-coloured urine throughout the day means that your body is well hydrated," he said.



Lim Han Ee,  
mindfulness coach,  
Emergen  
Performance

#### CHOOSE WHAT YOU PAY ATTENTION TO

#### • Meditate and disengage

Meditation is no more than breathing exercises, which Han Ee recommends as a quick way to boost energy levels. The trick is to disengage from the hustle and be in the moment.

"Find a time and place to meditate for five to 10 minutes. Sit upright, close your eyes, and count your breath. Each complete breath cycle — that is, breathing in and out — counts as one. When you hit eight, reset the counter and continue

to the next set.

"See if you can get up to four sets, that is, 32 breath cycles. If you lose count because of distractions, just reset and keep going," he said.

#### • Focus on your food when eating

Han Ee keeps digital distractions away from meal times. "It's just you and your food. Slow down your chewing, taste the food and explore the textures of the ingredients," he said.

#### • Take a break from routine

When your energy level drops, variety can do wonders, said Han Ee. Change the location where you're working. Take a quick walk to the pantry for a cup of tea. Or call home or loved ones to see how they are doing, he suggested.