

## Energy Boosters

### Ways to Get You Through the Day

Rebecca Jones

No amount of coaxing, pleading, or pedal pumping could get the engine in the rental car to turn over. It was going nowhere. The travelers had filled the car with unleaded fuel, but it had a diesel engine. It had been able to run a little way on the wrong fuel, but not far. And when it finally stopped, it stopped for good.

Sometimes cars and humans aren't so different. Both need the right fuel to run at maximum efficiency. Put too much of the wrong stuff in, and a breakdown may be unavoidable.

Here are some tips to keep your body humming along like a well-tuned engine, full of energy.

so-called "energy bars" are unpalatable but good for you, while candy bars are delicious but bad. Many energy bars are filled with sugar, so read labels, and look for high fiber, high protein, and limited carbs.

Nuts are among the best choices for healthy, pick-me-up snacks, nutritionists say. Nuts such as almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, and hazelnuts are all loaded with magnesium, a mineral whose health benefits include improving heart health, decreasing the risk of diabetes, reducing stress, improving muscle functioning, and reducing insomnia.

Another super snack food is dark

*"All you need is love. But a little chocolate now and then doesn't hurt."*

-Charles M. Schulz



You know you're supposed to get your eight hours!

### Be Snack Smart

Strategic snacking can be a good way to smooth out dips in your energy level and avoid hunger cravings that can lead you to overeat when you finally do sit down to a full meal. So go ahead and snack. Just be as choosy in your snack selection as you are in meal planning.

Don't fall for the fiction that all

chocolate, which is rich in heart-protecting antioxidants and can improve blood flow, which will energize flagging muscles. Even milk chocolate gets a thumbs up because it provides calcium for the bones. So enjoy it--in moderation.

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#### Office Hours and Contact

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## Stay Hydrated

Just because you're not thirsty does not mean you aren't dehydrated, and even slight dehydration can leave you tired and lethargic. The answer is, of course, to drink plenty of water. If the taste of plain water doesn't excite you, consider some of the flavored varieties, keeping in mind that loads of extra sugar should be avoided.

One increasingly popular healthy hydration alternative is coconut water, which studies suggest may hydrate more quickly than plain H<sub>2</sub>O and which contains more potassium and less sodium than other energy drinks.

## Massage and More

The inherent demands of your life may lead to muscle strains, stress, and other conditions that can affect your energy levels. One of the best strategies is to get into a regular pattern of receiving massage. If you feel the need for some quick bodywork between sessions, consider self-massage possibilities.

One option is to use a foam roller, a firm foam log that comes in varying thicknesses--think of them as comfy rolling pins. You can use your own body weight to generate direct pressure as you roll over the roller, working out muscle knots.

Aromatherapy is also a great way to get a quick energy boost, as certain scents are able to fight fatigue. Queen among them is peppermint, and other lethargy busters include eucalyptus, citrus, cardamom, and even cinnamon and black pepper.

## Get Some Rest

The number one myth about sleep is that you can get by on six hours a night. The truth is that the further away you deviate from getting eight hours sleep a night--and some people get too much, not too little--the greater the risk of cardiovascular disease, depression, obesity, and a host of other maladies.

Make sleep a priority. Get on a regular schedule, stick to it, and stop allotting to sleep only whatever time is left over after everything else gets accomplished. Once you've gone to bed, though, you have to actually go to sleep, and for many people that's no easy feat.

Caffeine is often the culprit. Caffeine is a great pick-me-up first thing in the morning, but it has a six- to seven-hour "half-life," meaning that half the caffeine in that cup of coffee you consumed to ward off the 3:00 p.m. doldrums will still be lingering in your bloodstream after the 10:00 p.m. news.

Another stimulant many people don't often consider is light--particularly light from a computer or television screen. Dim light from a soft reading lamp is fine, but the bright blue light of electronic devices sears itself into our minds and fools them into thinking it's still daylight outside, which makes falling asleep seem unnatural.

Heat, whether internal or external, will also disrupt sleep. The ideal room temperature for sleeping is around 65 degrees. The cool air then wicks away heat from your body, which allows you to fall asleep. Anything you do to

increase your body's core temperature, like exercising or eating a big meal right before bedtime, makes it harder for your body to cool down to a comfortable sleeping temperature.

Naps are tricky luxuries. Taken wisely and in moderation, they'll restore mental alertness and fuel you through a long afternoon. But too long a nap or a poorly-timed nap will leave you feeling drained after you get up, and will make it harder to fall asleep come bedtime. Timing also matters. Grab a morning nap to boost your creativity and mental alertness or a late-afternoon nap to restore lost physical energy and boost your immune system--a nap around noon provides a little of both.

Rebecca Jones is a Denver-based freelance writer.



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Snack smart and benefit from sustained energy throughout the day.

# Happiness is Contagious

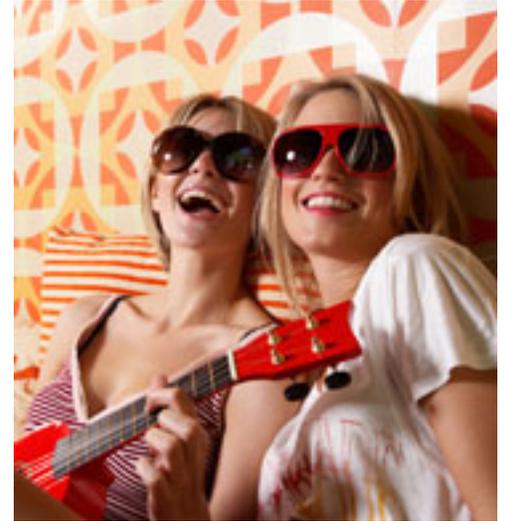
Maybe mom was right. Research suggests that surrounding yourself with friends and family who are happy can actually increase your own happiness.

Scientists at Harvard University and the University of California, San Diego, found that emotions, particularly happiness, have a viral effect in how they spread from one person to another. For every happy person in your physical social network, you have a 9 percent chance of increasing your own happiness. The effect is more pronounced the closer someone is to you geographically, and it does not seem to include electronic communications. The study, "Dynamic Spread of Happiness in a Large Social Network," can be found online in the British Medical Journal ([www.bmj.com](http://www.bmj.com)).

This is especially good news considering the potential health benefits of happiness and positivity. A study published in *Stroke* magazine has indicated a "significant association"

between optimism and a reduced risk of stroke. This is in addition to studies that have linked optimism to a healthier immune system, faster wound healing, and a lower risk of heart disease. While the exact cause of the benefits is not clear, one theory is that optimistic people are more likely to take care of their health. In addition, there is hope that teaching optimism could become part of a preventative program for various conditions.

What's one way to get happy? Try massage! Exposure to stress, a contributing factor to unhappiness, over a long period of time can increase the rate of neural degeneration and increase the risk for Alzheimer's disease. Luckily, a study from Umea University in Sweden has shown that just five minutes of massage has the potential to lower stress, and 80 minutes of massage has a tremendously positive effect on stress levels. Get massage, get happy, and cheer up your friends and family!



**Surrounding yourself with happy people is healthy!**

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## Fabulous Figs

### This little known fruit is rich in beauty benefits

*Shelley Burns*

As one of the oldest fruits enjoyed by humans, figs have a known history dating back to 9200 BCE in the Middle East. Part of the fig's mythology was that it had medicinal properties, like building muscle, enhancing fertility, and increasing stamina. Figs were considered a valuable gift in ancient times because of beliefs about these and other medicinal benefits.

Figs are enjoyed in Mediterranean countries, a region that has one of the healthiest diets in the world. Mediterranean cultures appreciate the nutritional potential of the fig, the benefits of which have been overlooked far too long in North America.

Figs are being used today to hydrate skin and restore its elasticity and firmness. They also help prevent cracked lips and

premature wrinkling. Figs have excellent hydration properties, since each has a water content of approximately 3/4 of a cup.

Alpha hydroxy acid (AHA) is used to refresh and brighten skin and is often used as an ingredient in skin exfoliation. Figs have natural AHA properties, and when ingested, behave somewhat like internal exfoliants. They also promote healthy digestion.

This ancient fruit also contains ficin, an antioxidant enzyme more powerful than papain (the active ingredient in papaya) for its ability to repair skin and slow aging.

Dried figs consist of a great source of soluble and insoluble fiber. Insoluble fiber has been shown to reduce

low-density lipoprotein (LDL), better known as bad cholesterol. Keep in mind that dried figs are high in natural sugars and should be used with caution if you have high blood sugar levels or diabetes.

Update your thinking on figs. They are not only a great source of fiber, but they are also a wonderful skin-enhancing resource.

*Shelley Burns, a doctor of naturopathic medicine, completed studies at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine, and has certification in complementary and integrative medicine from Harvard University.*

*"People are just  
as happy as they  
make up their  
minds to be."*

-Abraham Lincoln

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