

YOUR ENERGY PRESCRIPTION

How is it, despite all our attempts to sleep well, exercise regularly and eat healthily, that we still feel worn out? Time to reconsider what is really affecting our energy levels BY LORNA V

When we think about energy we tend to focus on physical energy, neglecting the fact that our energy levels are affected by so much more than what we eat or how much we move. We need to reassess the way we think about energy, says Jean Gomes, chairman of The Energy Project (theenergyproject.com): we might be emotionally drained, mentally exhausted, and wondering what the point of our life is. No wonder we're physically exhausted, too.

Gomes encourages us to think of energy as a system with four levels – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual – with each level affecting the others. 'How you eat affects your emotional state, which distracts your mental abilities, and then you don't pay attention to what and who is important in your life,' he says. It works in reverse, too. Not paying attention to what is important in our life distracts our brain, which then affects our emotional state, and leads to bad eating habits and lack of exercise, he explains.

Tackling each element is key to feeling more energised. 'If any dimension of our life is out of harmony, the whole of our being eventually suffers,' says consultant psychiatrist and spiritual healer Dr Brenda Davies. 'There is a lot of research supporting the idea that our emotional and psychological state affects our immune system and physical health,' she

says. 'People may be flogging themselves at the gym, but neglect to look at their marriage, which is falling apart, or the fact that they are unhappy at work.'

So this winter, take a holistic approach to energy boosting, and work on your mental, emotional and spiritual – as well as your physical – energy levels.

YOUR MIND

Mental energy is necessary for our brains to function effectively

THE INSTANT ENERGISER Check emails and social networks three times a day, rather than doing it constantly.

ENERGY-BOOSTING EXERCISES

Switch off. One of the best ways to boost mental energy is to switch off from mental activity, says Janice Haddon, head of mind matters at Health Matters 360. Anything that develops creativity gives our minds proper rest. 'TV is not a true form of relaxation as it over-stimulates the senses,' she says, as does surfing the web. 'Hobbies such as baking, gardening and painting are excellent,' says Haddon. Give yourself permission to switch off: in the long term you'll be more energised.

Take time out to breathe. It's the fastest, surest way to quieten the mind, and re-energise mentally, says Jamie Bloom, a tai chi teacher who has recently opened the Flore Retreat in Northamptonshire with Teresa Hale, founder of the Hale Clinic in London. Any holistic practice based on breathing, such as tai chi, yoga or meditation, accesses the part of the brain associated with calmness and creativity.

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YOUR EMOTIONS

We need emotional energy to feel secure and good

THE INSTANT ENERGISER Safeguard emotional energy by avoiding moaners, gossipers and pessimistic people.

ENERGY-BOOSTING EXERCISES

Think before you act. We are used to reacting constantly, says Gomes, a phenomenon created by the rise of instant communication. But reacting drains emotional energy. 'When you feel yourself reacting, whether it's to a work email from your boss or a bad driver, pull back,' he says. Whatever you feel compelled to do, be it firing off an email or shouting, don't do it.

Feed your emotions. Changing your diet can make all the difference, says Helen Heap, senior nutritionist at the Marilyn Glenville clinic (marilynnglenville.co.uk). 'As the days get shorter and darker, we produce less of the feel-good brain chemical serotonin,' she says. A good intake of wholegrains, such as brown rice and oats, which are rich in the B vitamins, helps with the production of serotonin. Magnesium, found in dark green leafy vegetables, is also essential. Watch your vitamin D levels, too. Less sunlight at this time of year means levels are reduced, which can affect our mood. Spend at least 15 minutes a day outside during daylight hours and eat vitamin D-rich oily fish and egg yolks, says Heap.

Focus on what's working. We all have certain needs in common, says Haddon: a safe environment, a sense of being able to do what we want, social connections, time for relaxation, a sense of achievement and being valued. If two or three of those aren't working out, we can feel low in emotional energy. 'You can't affect the wider world, so it's important to start with yourself,' he says. Focus on what is working well in your life. Write a list in a journal, or just make a mental note.

YOUR SPIRIT

Maintaining our values in life requires spiritual energy

THE INSTANT ENERGISER Making time for people you love is a source of spiritual energy.

ENERGY-BOOSTING EXERCISES

Consider what life means to you. For some, says Haddon, being spiritual means having a religious base, for others, it's about inner peace. It's important to address what it means to us, because 'it's from this core foundation that our mental resilience comes.'

Live your values. Gomes advises considering ways to align what you say you value with how you achieve this practically. 'If what matters to you is spending more time with your children, but you are caught up in working long hours to earn money for them, your life isn't aligned, so you may feel unhappy,' he says. Try to realign what you believe with how you act.

Be nice. Being kind, forgiving, smiling and having fun are all great spiritual energisers, says Davies. 'Emotions such as bitterness, resentment and fear pull us down into a spiral of negativity.'

YOUR BODY

Physical energy sustains us. Food is fuel, and exercise keeps our engine running

THE INSTANT ENERGISER Try to walk up the stairs or take a stroll at lunchtime, as desk-bound sedentary lives mean we use up too little physical energy.

ENERGY-BOOSTING EXERCISES

Exercise when you least feel like it. This is when you need it most, says Haddon. The key to motivation is to find the exercise you enjoy most, she says. 'Everyone has their own motivation point, so one person can happily be in the gym for an hour, but another might feel demotivated after 30 minutes.' Haddon recommends starting with walking or swimming, then experimenting – with dance, yoga, or tennis, for example.

Bring the pace down. Shorter days, combined with a fall in temperatures, make us feel sluggish. But we have a natural need to hibernate, says Davies. It's OK to rest more and re-energise for spring,' she says. But don't give up energy-boosting exercise. Instead, spend down time resting, not zooming around.

Control your blood sugar. The more stable our blood sugar levels, the more stable our energy levels. Heap suggests eating little and often (every three hours), with protein and slow release carbohydrates in each meal.