



Let's Talk

Sustainable Energy – Natural Energy Boosters

You've probably heard that sustainable energy is good for the planet. However, your personal energy level is also sustainable, and properly sustaining it can be good for your health.

Your energy level can fluctuate throughout any given day. Many of us hit a midday slump after lunch, for example, and a cup of coffee often seems to be a quick solution. While coffee and tea can indeed be natural energy lifters, the energy provided is the result of chemical stimulants that may not be healthy. More healthful and nourishing forms of energy actually are available.

ENERGY BOOSTERS

Some natural ways to revitalize yourself:

- Physical activity
 - Take a brisk walk
- Spend a little time in the sun
- Do breathing exercises
 - Certain breathing exercises can invigorate the body
- Do some stretching
- Splash cold water on your face and wrists
- Take a brief “power nap” – as little as 10-15 minutes can often work wonders
- Try aromatherapy
 - Some scents can be energizing, like citrus and mint

If you find yourself at the computer for long periods during your day, make sure you take occasional breaks, stretch, and get a walk in the fresh air, when possible.

EATING FOR ENERGY

It's no surprise that what you eat can affect your energy. The following provide more sustained energy:

- Fresh fruits—especially fruits high in vitamin C
- Raw vegetables
- Lean proteins

ENERGY DRAINS

Some foods can actually help drain you of energy. You'll want to avoid:

- Refined sugars—they can give you a quick boost in the beginning, but ultimately your energy will dip back down—often deeper than before you had the sugary drink or snack
- Meals high in carbohydrates
- Large meals
- Alcohol

SUSTAIN YOUR ENERGY REGULARLY

Having sustained energy is about more than just the occasional quick fix. You'll want to build the foundation for good health and natural energy reserves everyday—and every night.

Make sure you:

- Eat well
- Get plenty of exercise
- Get a good night's sleep



Making the Time ... for Family

Family can add so much to our lives. When our interactions are healthy and productive, family can be an incredible source of strength, healing, and love.

Spending quality time with your family can sometimes be difficult to arrange and maintain. But the key to finding quality time can be as simple as making a commitment and keeping it.

ESTABLISHING FAMILY TIME

You may prefer to be spontaneous, but setting aside a specific time can ensure that you will get together, for example:

- Dinner every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, with the immediate family
- Get-togethers once a month with the extended family

UNPLUGGING

For family time to be quality time, you'll need to let go of the common distractions—like television, computers, telephones, etc. Each individual can return to his or her favorite electronic media once family social time is over.

DINING TOGETHER

Dining together is a great way to have quality time. It provides a range of opportunities to interact. Here are a few tips to help make it special:

- Bond while preparing the meal by talking while everyone helps get the meal ready—setting the table, pouring drinks, tossing a salad, making sure very young children clean up, etc.
- Keep the conversation light and easy as you eat
- Keep the communication going as everyone helps clean up

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

How well do you know each other? One way to find out is to have an outing once every so often (every two weeks, for example) to a place or event that relates to someone's particular interests.

A trip to the aquarium, theater, sporting event, or a museum, can help you share in another family member's interests and learn to understand him or her better.

KEEPING THE PEACE

Family times are bound to have their difficult moments, so patience and perseverance are sometimes required. Family time should not be a time to address heavy subjects or family grievances. Any family "business" should be conducted in a separate forum.

Often, the more time you spend together, the better you'll understand each other. Keeping an open mind and allowing the other person to be who they are without judgment can bring unexpected appreciation for the other person's unique personality.

Make the time for family. You'll be glad you did. □



Don't Be in Distress, Instead "De-Stress" at Your Desk



We often cannot control the amount of external stress that we experience. What we can control, however, is our internal reaction to that stress. Being able to minimize your reaction can help keep your body and mind healthy.

Most people can benefit from "downtime"—those times when you are able to recharge and renew. Even something as simple as a few moments of silence and some deep breathing can help revitalize you and give you a more positive outlook for the rest of the day.

STRESS RELIEF AT YOUR DESK

Here are a few things you can do in the office to de-stress:

Deep breathing

- This technique helps you relax and renew by unplugging you from the "flight or fight" stress response.
- Consciously slow your breathing.
 - Focus on slowly taking deep, regular breaths that get progressively longer and fuller.
 - Visualize each breath filling your body with positive energy.
 - Do this exercise for five or ten minutes.

Progressive relaxation

For this relaxation method, focus on tightening each muscle group and then allow it to relax.

- Start at your toes and progress up your body—don't forget your face muscles.
- Tighten, then release each muscle group as you work your way up your body.
- Tightening the muscle allows the blood to rush in when the muscle is in its relaxed state.
- Once you've finished tightening and releasing all the muscles, stay in this relaxed state for three to five minutes (longer, if you have the time).

Visualization

This technique helps you relax and focus on pleasant images to replace negative or stressful feelings.

- Relax as much as possible (you can use any of the two techniques above to help you relax more deeply).

- Get a clear picture in your mind of a place that brings you peace.
- You can take a mental vacation to your favorite getaway—by the ocean, a river, a rainforest, etc.

Positive affirmations

Positive affirmations are statements that reprogram negative thinking patterns.

- Repeat a positive statement to counteract a negative thought whenever you experience it.
- If you're inner chatter is about feeling tired and weak, you may want to affirm "I am healthy and strong."
- If you're worried about a hectic work schedule with many projects, a good affirmation is "I accomplish things, easily and effortlessly" or "I can handle anything that comes my way."

Taking Care

Deep relaxation is an important part of the health puzzle. Your body and your mind need it to repair and renew. □

GETTING PERSONAL: SIMPLE TOUCHES THAT CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Today's office is generally more efficient than ever, thanks to modern technology. Email, electronic files, instant messaging, and paperless transactions keep things running smoothly.

The upside of the new technology is that we can share information quickly and across great distances—even to the other side of the globe—within seconds. The downside is that these modern communication systems can physically separate us from people who are just down the hall, reducing the number of face-to-face interactions that we have with our coworkers in the course of a work week.

It's unfortunate when that's the case, because personal interactions can provide the mutual familiarity and understanding that make for a healthy work environment. If your office lacks the human touch, you may need to think of creative ways to connect with people on a more personal level in your work environment.

- Instead of using the phone or email, walk over to a coworker's office for clarification on an email or memo
- Just pop your head in to say "good morning" to colleagues or ask about their weekend
- Bring a healthy treat to share with your office
- Invite one of your colleagues to go out with you for coffee or lunch
- Thank an office mate by giving them a handwritten note or card
- Have a mini-meeting—less than 15 minutes long (set the timer)—to solve an issue that in the past might have caused a barrage of emails
- Start a walking club—a quick break for a brisk walk



Not only can such face-to-face contact foster goodwill with you coworkers, a personal visit can have many positive side effects. You get away from your office; move the body a bit; shake out the mental cobwebs; and possibly come back to your office with a new perspective on one of your projects.

In fact, it's often in these more relaxed interactions that one gains inspiration, gets ideas for better collaboration, or is presented with a new solution to a previously sticky problem. If nothing else, let your coworkers know that they are valued and worthy of your time.

Try it! You'll find that the seemingly small and simple personal touches can make a big difference. □



This newsletter is brought to you by the Federal Occupational Health (FOH) Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

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