

## A NATURAL SPRING IN YOUR STEP

The inside scoop on foods that can help you feel more energetic, alert, and give you a little more bounce.

What puts a spring in your step? Intangible things like recent good news, a beautiful day, or falling in love? How about food? That choice rarely comes to mind, but there are a number of foods that have the potential to give you more energy and lift your spirits.

Here are some foods that will help you relieve fatigue, maximize your energy levels, and put that spring in your step.

### Fruits and vegetables

Are you surprised that fruits and vegetables top the list? These nutrient-packed treasures not only give you a great assortment of vitamins and minerals; they also have different phytochemicals (like flavanoids, for example) that provide additional nutrition or antioxidant protection.

Vegetables like bell peppers, spinach, kale, arugula, and chard, are flavorful, low-calorie, and have a high nutritional density—packed with vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Ideally, you're getting a good mix of different types and colors of fruits and vegetables and benefitting from the spirit-lifting vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals. Besides containing so many nutrients, fruits and vegetables also tend to be light in calories and, when eaten raw, they contain plenty of water.

We tend not to think of water as a nutrient, per se, but it's a vital part of feeling well. **Getting enough water throughout the day can make you feel energized and alive.** Not getting enough, however, can be taxing on the body and make you feel run down. In addition, water's a great no-calorie refresher.

### Lighten your steps

Of course, eating light can also put a spring in your step—the smaller your portions, the lighter you feel. Also, digesting a heavy meal requires energy, which has to be diverted from other bodily processes. This can make you feel like you're being zapped of energy.

Mindful eating can help you eat less. Slow down, take your time, and be aware of the whole experience every time you sit down for a meal.

### A little, not a lot

Recent studies have found that more frequent, but smaller amounts of caffeine—about the amount in a cup of green tea—throughout the day appear to be better than large amounts—like in a cup of coffee—for staying alert. So, think tea for getting that occasional lift.. □



This newsletter is brought to you by the Federal Occupational Health (FOH) Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP provides assessment, counseling, referral, management consultation, and coaching services to Federal employees and agencies throughout the United States.

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# Let's Talk

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## Back on Your Feet: Cultivating Resiliency

Resilience is about thriving, not just surviving. It's a tool for participating as fully as possible in life—**getting back on your feet even after life has thrown you a curveball.**

### Build up your reserves

Having good resilience is often about having good reserves—of energy, patience, nutrition, sleep, etc. These reserves can be built up by:

- Getting quality sleep on a regular basis
- Eating well – choose nutrient-rich foods that add to your health and reserves
- Having occasional downtime – having five minutes here or there (without activity or electronics) can really make a difference for feeling balanced and refreshed
- Training your mind and emotions – through deep relaxation and meditation you can become naturally less reactive and more patient
- Connecting with others – spending quality time with friends and loved ones can be beneficial to both your psychological and physical health

### Create space

**Having resilience doesn't mean, however, taking it on the chin or keeping a stiff upper lip.**

There are times when you may be overwhelmed. These may be the times when you just need to back away, regroup, and reassess.

### Get the help you need

There may also be times when you need outside help. It could be anything from asking your spouse or parents to take care of the kids so that you can have the night off, or seeking professional help to work out emotional or psychological issues.

### Choose wisely

While it's important to connect with others, it's equally important to cultivate those relationships that make you feel good about yourself and about life—and spend less time with those that don't promote your emotional and mental health.

### Take a creative and flexible approach

If your usual tactics for solving a problem or changing a situation don't put you back on your feet, try a totally new strategy. You may be surprised when it works out better.

### Checking your ego at the door

Not taking things personally can often help lessen the impact of an event. If you look at the situation objectively you can see, for example, that the other person collided with you accidentally. It wasn't a personal attack. Removing yourself from the situation can help you get a clearer picture.

### Play the hand you've been dealt

Of course, things could always be better, but situations that look like a "losing hand" can turn around if "played" skillfully. Stay in the game.

The good news is that if you build up your reserves, you'll have the bounce-back you need. □



# Social Connections and Healthy Aging

Keeping up with friends, family, and other social connections—and making new ones—can be important to your overall quality of life and feelings of well-being, especially as you age.

While social networks may get smaller as you grow older, it's important that you maintain and seek out, when possible, connections with those who can help you feel cared for and valued.

## Social connections and health

More and more studies are finding the importance of social engagement for good health as we age. For example, recent research has found a connection between the psychological stress caused by depression and an increased risk for death and disability. Positive social interaction has been shown to be an antidote for this type of stress. A link has also been found between the distress of being socially isolated and poor health. In addition, research on adults 60 years and older has found a connection between feeling lonely and a declining ability to perform activities of daily living, as well as an increased risk of death.

## Stay connected

Relationships and social support are a key part of healthy aging. In fact, staying connected and socially involved

can help to protect you from feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression. Being socially engaged may also ward off poor health and ultimately help you maintain your overall well-being. Various studies have shown that older adults who participate in activities they find meaningful often report feeling healthier and happier.

Here are some activities that can help you stay connected to others:

- Phone a friend or loved one
- Join a walking or exercise group
- Participate in activities at your local community center
- Visit friends and family
- Go dancing
- Sign up for a class
- Join a senior center
- Form or join a book club

- Get involved with your local place of worship
- Play cards and other games with friends
- Go to a theater, movie, or sporting event
- Take short trips with an organized group

## Go outside yourself

Consider volunteering at a hospital, library, or other organization. Volunteering with friends or loved ones can add to the benefit. This can give you a chance to do something meaningful for your community while bonding with someone close to you. Volunteering is a simple act of serving that allows you to give of yourself—and go outside yourself.

Being socially connected can make a difference in your life and your health. □



# A Winning Smile

It's the face "lift" that also lifts your mood. Smiling can alter your brain chemistry, reduce your stress, and make you happier.

**Smiling can lift your mood** – Smiling alters your body's chemistry by increasing the amount of endorphin and serotonin that are available to your body. Numerous studies have found that these two neuro-chemicals can help with those bodily changes that you experience as a good mood:

- Body relaxes
- Heart rate lowers
- Blood pressure lowers
- Breath becomes steady
- Feelings of stress ease
- Mood lifts

Also, when you're in a good mood, you have the potential to improve the mood of those around you.

**Smiling can trigger the nervous system to rest** – Smiling can set the "relaxation response" in motion. This activation of the body's parasympathetic nervous system, which is sometimes referred to as the "rest and digest" mode—in contrast to the "flight or fight" response of the sympathetic nervous system—allows your overall nervous system to take a well-deserved rest.

**Smiling may boost your immune system function** – In turn, the sense of relaxation produced by smiling allows your immune system to maintain a more positive, stress-free state in which it can work more efficiently.

**Smiling helps you look younger** – The muscles that you use to smile are instrumental in "lifting" your face up and making you appear younger. You don't need to use an unnatural or dramatic smile—just smile naturally.

**Smiling can change people's attitude toward you** – Ask yourself a question—are you more likely to be attracted to people who smile? Various studies have shown that when you smile, you increase your chances of being perceived as an authentic, empathetic, attractive, confident, self-assured, happy, trustworthy, and memorable person. So, try it. Put on a smile. People may view you in a different light.

**Smiling may help you live longer** – The effects of a good smile are more than skin deep.

A recent study out of Wayne State University that looked at the 1952 registry of Major League Baseball players found that players who had a strong smile lived an average of 7 years longer than those who didn't.

Smiling not only makes you feel good—it can be infectious, causing others to smile as well, which is a win-win situation. □

