

Wellness-Fitness

FEDERAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Adding Antioxidants to Your Diet

Most of the recent research supports getting your antioxidants from your daily diet—through fruits, vegetables, and plant oils—rather than from supplements.

As we learn more and more about the science of food and nutrition, there seems to be a growing emphasis on antioxidants. This interest in antioxidants is even being used as a way to sell certain foods—everything from soft drinks to candies have antioxidants added to them in an attempt to make them appear healthier.

“Antioxidant” is a broad term used to describe substances that can help protect the body from oxidative stress. “Oxidation” is what scientists call the process of removing electrons from an atom or molecule.

Just as oxidation causes iron to rust, oxidation in our bodies can damage cells. This damage has been linked to diseases like cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, as well as some diseases of the eyes and nervous system.

What Researchers Are Saying

While it’s agreed that antioxidants are generally good for you, most scientific studies have not shown that taking antioxidant supplements carries the same benefits as getting antioxidants directly from the food that you eat. In fact, some studies have shown a connection between taking supplements and some

negative health consequences.

The evidence from scientific studies has shown two main things:

- People who report eating foods that naturally contain a lot of antioxidants, like fruits and vegetables, appear to lower their risk for a number of diseases and early death.
- People who are given antioxidants in the form of supplements do not always benefit from them, and sometimes taking the supplements causes unwanted side effects.

Adding Antioxidants to Your Day

The first step is to make sure you have a colorful diet of fruits and vegetables. Each vegetable has different advantages, as far as antioxidants go, so make sure you get a variety of different colors throughout your day.

- Start your day with a piece of fruit or make a colorful fruit salad
- Replace your daily snack with a piece of fruit or vegetable sticks
- Have unsweetened green or black tea instead of soda for your beverage
- Make a salad using as many different colored vegetables as you can
- Include fresh herbs with your meals

Remember to keep your calorie count and fat intake at a healthy level for your current weight management program. The good news is that, besides being a good source for antioxidants, many fruits and vegetables are naturally lower in calories than other food choices. □



What Could Chronic Low Energy Be Telling You?

If you are experiencing low energy levels that aren't relieved by adequate sleep, good nutrition, or relaxation techniques, you should seek medical attention.

Low energy can be a normal—and temporary—response to a number of things, including: poor eating habits, emotional stress, boredom, physical overexertion, or, of course, lack of sleep.

However, if you're constantly feeling "drained," your low energy may be a symptom of an underlying medical problem that requires treatment.

What is Chronic Low Energy?

Chronic low energy is a feeling or sensation of tiredness, weariness, exhaustion, or weakness that doesn't go away when you rest.

Are You At Risk?

Chronic low energy can occur in any age group or population. However, it's particularly common in the elderly and in people with chronic diseases.

Possible Causes

Chronic low energy has a wide variety of possible causes, ranging from disease, infections, mental health issues, even reactions to prescription medications.

Symptoms

Chronic low energy may be accompanied by a variety of symptoms. These will vary

depending on the underlying cause.

Some common symptoms that may occur with chronic low energy include:

- Apathy
- Depression
- Diarrhea or vomiting
- Difficulty concentrating
- Flu-like symptoms
- Loss of appetite
- Pain
- Unexplained weight loss

Know When to Seek Medical Attention

In some cases, chronic low energy can be a symptom of a serious or life-threatening condition. Seek immediate medical care if you, or someone you know, experience any of these symptoms:

- Swelling or severe pain in the abdomen
- Bleeding (for example, blood in your urine, vomiting blood, rectal bleeding, or bloody stools)
- Changes in level of consciousness or alertness (such as passing out or being unresponsive)

- Changes in mental status or behavior (confusion, delirium, lethargy, hallucinations, etc.)
- Chest pain, tightness, or pressure
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Heart palpitations
- High fever
- Inability to urinate
- Respiratory or breathing problems
- Seizure
- Stiff neck accompanied with a rash, nausea and vomiting, fever, and confusion
- Swelling in the body

While you shouldn't be alarmed because you have chronic low energy, it is something that you'll want to share with your physician as soon as you can. The good news is once the cause is discovered it can probably be treated and you can get back on track with your life. □



Avoiding Burnout at Work

Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed and are unable to meet constant demands. However, there's good news: **burnout can often be avoided.**

It's not unusual to have an occasional day where you feel bored, overloaded, or unappreciated at work. However, if you are experiencing these feelings on a regular basis, you may be experiencing burnout.

Avoid Burnout

In order to avoid burnout, it's important to maintain a good work-life balance. Here are some tips:

1. Start your day with a relaxing ritual. Rather than jumping out of bed as soon as you wake up, spend some time meditating, writing in a journal, doing stretches, or reading something that inspires you.

2. Adopt healthy habits. When you eat right, engage in regular physical activity, and get plenty of rest, you're more likely to have the energy and resilience to deal with the hassles and demands of work.

3. Learn how to manage stress.

4. Set boundaries. Don't overextend yourself at work. Learn how to say "no" (when appropriate) to overwhelming requests on your time.

5. Take breaks. Set aside some time to get away from work. This can mean anything from going on a short 5-minute walk to taking a week off for vacation.

Causes of Burnout

You may experience burnout for a variety of reasons:

- Having unclear job expectations or goals
- Being in a dysfunctional working environment
- Having an excessive workload
- Experiencing a lack of support or recognition from your boss or organization
- Monotony at work

Warning Signs: You Might Be Burned Out If You...

- Feel helpless, hopeless, cynical, or resentful

- Experience ongoing reduced productivity
- Experience physical ailments such as headaches, illness, or backaches
- Feel as if most days are "bad" days
- Feel exhausted all the time
- Feel like nothing you do makes a difference or is appreciated
- Spend the majority of your day on tasks that you find to be dull or overwhelming

Left unnoticed, these symptoms can have a negative impact on your job, work, relationships, and health.

Seek Help

Burnout doesn't happen overnight and you may not always be able to pinpoint its exact causes. If you think you are experiencing burnout, contact an EAP counselor or life coach. You can find information about EAP's counseling services on your agency's intranet or from your HR department. □



What's So Fantastic about Fiber?

“**Eat more fiber.**” You hear it everywhere. But do you know why fiber is so good for your health?

Health Benefits Associated with Fiber

Fiber doesn't add vitamins or minerals to your body, but it still plays an important part in maintaining your health. In fact, various studies have shown links between eating a high-fiber diet and a number of health benefits, including:

- Lowered cholesterol levels
- Lowered risk of heart disease
- Lowered risk of developing type 2 diabetes
- Reduced risk of stroke
- Overall gastrointestinal tract and bowel health
- Prevention or relief of constipation

What is Fiber?

Fiber, also known as roughage or bulk, is the part of whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and nuts that your body can't digest or absorb. These parts of the plant simply pass through your digestive

tract and out of your body. That may not sound like much, but good things happen in the process.

Types of Dietary Fiber

Soluble fiber makes you feel full. It dissolves in water and forms a gel-like substance that exits the stomach slowly. It is found in higher amounts in certain types of fruits and vegetables (like apples, citrus fruits, pears, strawberries, and carrots), legumes, seeds, nuts, and whole grains (like oats, barley, and psyllium).

Insoluble fiber promotes the movement of material through your digestive system. This type of fiber is found in higher amounts in certain types of vegetables (like cucumbers, cauliflower, zucchini, celery, and tomatoes), legumes, seeds, nuts, and whole grains.

How Can I Add Fiber to My Diet?

The National Cancer Institute recommends that adults consume 20 to 35 grams of fiber per day.

There are many ways to add fiber to your diet. Here are some ideas:

- Choose high-fiber breakfast cereals
- Eat more whole grains and whole grain products
- Eat fruit as a snack and with your meals
- Make a salad part of every dinner
- Snack on raw vegetables or low-fat popcorn
- Add beans to your salads and side dishes
- Use brown rice instead of white rice

Adding high-fiber foods to your diet is a great way to be healthy. To receive the greatest health benefits, it's important that you incorporate both soluble and insoluble fibers to your daily food intake. For recipe and food ideas, check out our nutrition and recipes webpage. □

