

Newsflash

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Pill Swallowing Made Easy

Getting tablets and capsules down the hatch isn't easy for everyone. But a study of 151 volunteers reported that two techniques made swallowing large tablets and capsules significantly easier. For capsules, try the "lean forward" method: put the capsule on your tongue, take a sip of water, and before swallowing, tilt your head down slightly toward your chest. Swallow with your head bent forward. For tablets, try the "pop bottle" method (but check with your doctor first if you have trouble swallowing): Fill a flexible plastic bottle with water. Put the tablet on your tongue, then close your lips tightly around the bottle opening. Purse your lips and suck the water as you tilt your head back slightly. Swallow the pill and water immediately. (Don't let air get into the bottle.)



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Getting Advice from a Food Pro

Think you're an expert at eating well? Probably not. More than half of the people in a survey by the International Food Information Council Foundation, a nonprofit group, said it was easier to prepare their taxes than to figure out what they should eat for better health. You probably hire someone to help with your taxes, so why not get help for your diet? An expert on food and nutrition might not cost as much as you think, and getting tips on healthy eating can help you stick to a good routine.

People with cancer, diabetes, heart disease, or weight problems may especially benefit. Dietary changes can help those conditions and in some cases reduce or even eliminate the need for medication. A food and nutrition expert can also help with digestive disorders such as celiac disease, colitis, and food allergies. Athletes and women who are pregnant, trying to become pregnant, or breast-feeding, are also good candidates for professional dietary advice.

NUTRITIONIST VS DIETICIAN. So where do you look for help? In some states, people can call themselves "nutritionists" without any qualifications, according to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. But registered dietitians have at least a bachelor's degree with specific coursework and training in nutrition and dietetics, and must pass an examination administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration. They must also complete continuing-education classes to maintain their professional status.

The advice you get will depend on your age, gender, weight, and medical history, as well as such factors as your lifestyle, food preferences, and nutrition concerns. You'll receive a personalized plan to meet your overall eating or health goals. Depending on your needs, you might come away with weekly meal plans, recipes for healthy dishes, or a new understanding on how to read food labels. A registered dietitian might even accompany you to a grocery store, visit your home to help you stock a healthier pantry, or review the best options on menus at your favorite restaurants.

Regardless of your goal, a registered dietitian will almost always want to know what you usually eat. To save appointment time and improve accuracy, keep a food diary for a week before your first visit. There are several phone apps that can assist you in keeping track of your daily meals.

FINDING A PRO. The best way to find a registered dietitian is by asking your doctor for a recommendation. Your health insurance might cover referrals made for medical reasons. Or go to the academy's website, Eatright.org, click on "find a registered dietitian," and enter your zip code or city and state. Professionals with specific expertise can be found, including those who specialize in vegetarian or gluten-free diets, and those who work with people who have cancer.

You can also search for registered dietitians who focus on your area of concern, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or weight loss. Some other free resources to consider include grocery stores and hospitals. Many have registered dietitians on staff who provide nutrition advice, classes, or lectures.

BOTTOM LINE. Beware of so called "nutritionists," who might try to sell you unnecessary and costly vitamins, minerals, and dietary supplements. Instead, stick with practitioners who are registered dietitians. Some insurance providers, including Medicare, will cover nutritional counseling by a registered dietitian for certain conditions, such as diabetes and kidney disease, when you're referred by a licensed healthcare provider. Without insurance, the cost can vary from \$50 to \$250 per visit, depending on the practitioner and where you live.

How to Get All-Day Energy

In a slump? A few changes in your daily routine may be all you need to fight fatigue.

Young, old, and in-between – no one is immune to the occasional bout of low energy and weariness. In fact, fatigue is the top complaint at about 5 million doctor appointments per year.

For many people, though, there's no medical problem draining their batteries. Stress, poor diet, poor quality sleep, lack of exercise, and limited bright light exposure during the day can all contribute to fatigue.

Timed right, small changes in your routine can give you a lift during the day and improve sleep. See your doctor if you have other symptoms – such as unexplained weight gain or loss, fever, shortness of breath, morning headaches, or difficulty concentrating – or recently started a new medication. Otherwise, give these seven strategies a try for a month to see whether your energy levels reboot.

MORNING

Let the sunshine in. The brain makes melatonin, the hormone that causes sleepiness, when it's dark. Morning light helps stop the production of melatonin. Upon awakening, open the curtains or shades, sit by a window (even if it's cloudy outdoors) while you eat breakfast, or take a morning walk. And continue to expose yourself to light during the day to keep your body's sleep-wake cycle synchronized; this helps combat daytime sleepiness and promotes better nighttime shut-eye.

Take a drink break. Even mild dehydration can zap energy, memory, and attention, according to a study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. Older adults can have a tougher time staying hydrated, in part because the mechanism that triggers thirst may become less efficient with age. To compensate, make it a point to drink at regular intervals throughout the day, beginning in the morning. Coffee and tea count (they have only a mild diuretic affect, if any), as do foods with a high water content, such as soup and most fruits and vegetables.

AFTERNOON

Get moving. It seems counterintuitive, but physical activity is a powerful antidote for fatigue. And it doesn't have to be strenuous: In a small University of Georgia study, couch potatoes who engaged in a 20-minute, low-intensity aerobic exercise routine three times per week for six weeks reduced their fatigue by 65 percent; those who engaged in moderate-intensity exercise lowered it by 49 percent.

Stop sipping coffee and tea. Thanks to their caffeine, both are great pick-me-ups, but it's a good idea to limit the stimulant to 400 mg per day (roughly two to four 8-ounce cups of coffee) and taper off by late afternoon. Caffeine can disrupt sleep when it's consumed even 6 hours before bedtime.

EVENING

Power down. Dim the lights, switch off the TV, and put away smartphones, tablets, and computers at least an hour before bedtime. This will trigger your brain to start producing melatonin.

Make over your bedtime habits. In a Consumer Reports survey of 4,023 adults, 68 percent said they have trouble sleeping at least once a week. Too little or poor quality sleep can cause daytime droopiness. To get the 7 to 9 hours of slumber you need to restore body and mind, improve your sleep hygiene. Keep your bedroom dark, use your bed only for sex and sleep (no pets allowed), and stick with regular sleep schedule.

Address your stress. Sometimes it's difficult to separate physical fatigue from the mental drain caused by life's demands and worries. Mindful meditation quiets your mind, so your brain isn't hijacked by anxious or racing thoughts of the day or by what has to be done in the future. It centers you and helps set the stage for sleep.



Eat Nuts and Flax for Your Heart

Finicky about fish? Getting good-for-your-omega-3 fatty acids from flaxseed, walnuts, and other fin-free foods appears to be as beneficial for your heart as eating fatty fish such as salmon, according to a Pennsylvania State University review. Experts have previously touted eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) omega-3s from fish because they've been linked with lower rates of cardiovascular disease. But until recently, less was known about the potential benefits of the plant-based omega-3 alpha-linolenic acid (ALA). According to one study author, research suggests that consuming 2 to 3 grams of ALA per day may have cardiovascular benefits. That's the amount in an ounce of walnuts or 1 ½ tablespoons of ground flaxseed. Other ALA sources include canola oil, chia seeds, and firm tofu.

