

BY MAURA RHODES

**f**or most women, becoming a mom is the beginning of the end of endless energy, but fatigue doesn't have to be part of the parenthood package. The key, say experts, is to compensate for those things that leave you drained with those that help rev you up. It's like keeping a positive balance in your bank account: Make enough energy deposits to offset the "automatic withdrawals" that occur as you chase your toddler, do the laundry, and referee sibling squabbles. The currency? Good nutrition, exercise, enough sleep, healthy ways to handle stress, and the right attitude.

Simple lifestyle changes can boost stamina so you feel better, do more.

**Get energized!**

AUGUST ALTERA HAIR AND MAKEUP, NANCY BELTRANDI FOR UTOPIA.

The right food can fuel you

Food is essential for energy, yet many women don't eat enough because they're afraid of gaining weight or they don't have time. When it comes to eating for energy, the first rule is, be consistent: Have meals and light snacks at the same time each day. "Even if you don't feel hungry at your regular lunchtime, eat," says Georgia Kostas, nutrition director at the Cooper Clinic, in Dallas, and author of *The Balancing Act Nutrition and Weight Guide* (Balancing Act Nutrition Books). "That way you'll head off hunger pangs that are bound to surface later." Don't overdo it, however. "If you're used to a 300-calorie sandwich for lunch and you splurge on a 1,000-calorie meal, an hour later you'll experience a 10 percent decrease in performance," says Bonnie Spring, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Chicago Medical School.

What you eat is as important as when and how much. **Don't fill up on carbohydrates alone.** Though athletes often carbo-load before a competition, eating only a plain bagel, a

mound of spaghetti, or a candy bar can undermine energy levels. "Consuming a pure carbohydrate triggers an increase in the brain chemical serotonin, which makes you drowsy," explains Spring. To prevent the serotonin rise, add some protein to your meal or snack—about 5 percent of total calories. That translates into low-fat cream cheese on your bagel, some yogurt with fruit, or a few slices of chicken on a salad. If you do eat candy, drink some skim milk.

**Be smart about fat.** While your overall daily fat intake should not exceed 30 percent of total calories, including a little bit in each meal helps you feel satisfied for up to six hours. "When fat is eaten along with carbohydrate and protein, it leaves the stomach at a slower rate than other foods, so you can go longer between meals without experiencing a slump," says Madelyn H. Fernstrom, Ph.D., associate director of the center for nutrition at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. Just remember: The healthiest fats come from plants, with the exception of palm and coconut oils.

**Eat iron-rich foods.**

Iron is essential for transporting oxygen from your lungs to your cells, so if you get too little you may feel

sluggish, according to Kostas. A woman age 19 to 50 needs 15 milligrams (mg) of iron daily. The richest sources include lean red meat, such as top beef loin (a 3½-ounce serving has 3 mg of iron) and liver (one 3½-ounce serving has nearly 7 mg). Other sources include green leafy vegetables (one cup of chopped spinach has 3 mg), chickpeas, and pinto beans (a half cup of either has about 2½ mg). To boost your body's ability to absorb iron, cook food in cast-iron pots, and eat a vitamin C-rich food along with your source of iron. For example, drink orange juice with iron-fortified cereal or sprinkle lemon juice on spinach salad.

**Eat a well-balanced diet.**

While magnesium, copper, zinc, and the B vitamins do not directly provide energy, they help the body convert food into fuel. To get the nutrients you need, eat at least three different kinds of food at each meal. Over the course of a day, try to have at least five servings of whole grains and cereals; two to four of fruits; three to five of vegetables; two to three of dairy; and two to three of meat.

**Drink fluids.** Dehydration causes fatigue. Try to

How caffeine saps energy

Millions of people turn to coffee, tea, or caffeinated soda for a quick pick-me-up. But too much caffeine can undermine energy levels. Because caffeine acts as a diuretic, more than ten ounces a day can cause you to become dehydrated, which in turn is fatiguing. To prevent dehydration, limit caffeine, and for every cup of coffee, tea, or caffeinated soda you have, drink a glass of water, advises Georgia Kostas, nutrition director at the Cooper Clinic, in Dallas.

food," says Alan E. Mikesky, Ph.D., director of the human performance and biomechanics lab at Indiana University Purdue University, in Indianapolis. "The fitter you are, the more effective your body will be at making ATP and the more energetic you'll feel."

Also, being aerobically fit means you can do physical tasks more easily, so you're less likely to feel exhausted afterward. "If you normally walk up

three flights of stairs, it might take 85 percent of your maximum heart rate to climb them if you're out of shape," says B. Don Franks, Ph.D., chair of the department of kinesiology at Louisiana State University. But if you've developed cardiovascular endurance, climbing the stairs may use only 72 percent of your maximum capacity, leaving you with more energy for the rest of the day.

To achieve aerobic fitness, do 30 minutes of moderate aerobic activity five days a week. If

Fresh fruits and veggies are packed with energy-rich nutrients.



you don't have 30 consecutive minutes to spare, try doing three ten-minute sessions during the day (see "Power Surges," page 136). "Exercise also releases mood-elevating endorphins and burns up chemicals produced by the body during stressful situations," says Timothy J. Moore, Ph.D., an exercise physiologist in Los Angeles.

Exercise is energizing

Muscular strength can also prevent fatigue. The stronger your muscles are, the less tir-

have two quarts of fluid each day: one of water and one of a noncaffeinated beverage, such as milk, juice, or broth.

"Our main energy source is a chemical called adenosine triphosphate, or ATP, which the body manufactures from the breakdown of

# Eat for sleep

What you eat before you go to bed could affect your ability to sleep, leaving you fatigued the next day. Below, tips on eating for a good night's rest.

**Don't go to bed hungry.** Studies have linked the consumption of food with the ability to fall asleep, although no one knows why. **Eat lightly if you eat within an hour of going to bed.** A full stomach can make lying down uncomfortable.

**Have a low-fat snack of less than 150 calories.** A piece of fruit, some frozen yogurt, or a cookie or two will quell hunger pangs without filling you up.

## Limit alcohol and caffeine.

Don't have more than one drink with dinner. If caffeine keeps you awake, don't down a caffeinated beverage at night. **Stick with habits that work.** Opinions vary on the sleep-enhancing properties of milk, but most experts agree that if you regularly drink a glass of skim milk (or eat any other food) prebedtime, you should continue doing so. "Habits are powerful, so in all likelihood you'll have a restful night's sleep," says Bonnie Spring, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Chicago Medical School.

ing activities such as carrying a toddler will be. To build muscle, lift weights (start with one to three pounds) two to three times a week, with a day of rest between sessions.

## Getting enough sleep is crucial

One of the main purposes of sleep is to restore energy. "During sleep, biological

well you meet your biologically determined sleep needs. Most people function best on eight hours of sleep; some are fine with six; others need ten. (You can probably get away with one less hour of sleep than you need for a few weeks, but no more.) The second is related to when you go to sleep. If you can schedule your bedtime so that you fall asleep when your body's ready to, you're almost guaranteed to feel refreshed the next day.

Unfortunately there are no guarantees in the life of a parent. "We're meant to go through four to five 90-minute cycles of progressively deeper sleep each night," says Hughes. Between each cycle we awaken briefly without remembering we did, but when forced awake—by, say, a sick child—it can mean trouble.

You can counter the effects of a rotten night's sleep and restore alertness by taking a 20- to 60-minute nap in the morning or early afternoon, says Hughes. If you can't rest until late afternoon or evening, however, don't sleep more than 20 minutes. Otherwise, you're likely to fall into such a deep sleep that you'll experience "sleep inertia" when you wake, and feel sluggish and drowsy for up to 30 minutes. If you have a newborn, try to nap

of her baby. For this reason, a new mother is better able to sleep during the day.

## Stress can drain energy reserves

Stress is the sneakiest of energy-sappers. When you're tired, you yawn; when you're hungry, your stomach rumbles. But when you're worried or overextended, you're rarely aware that your body is pumping out adrenaline nonstop, which drains you.

"You don't have to do physical labor to feel worn out," says Howard E. A. Tinsley, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Southern Illinois University, in Carbondale. "A psychological experience, such as a child's minor discipline problem, can cause fatigue." So can doing a single activity (such as paperwork) for a long time.

To counter mental and emotional de-energizers, experts suggest these tactics.

**Prioritize.** When faced with half a dozen tasks, do only those that will matter in the long run.

**Call a time-out.** One of the best ways to conquer a stressful situation is to walk away from it for awhile, suggests Robert A. Hicks, Ph.D., profes-

stance. Taking steps to control the problem will help you feel better.

**Respect your limitations.** Between one and three o'clock in the afternoon, or between four and six, you probably feel tired. This is partially because by that time of day, you've put in several hours of activity, but it's also an inevitable phenomenon of physiology. "We all have natural fluctuations in our rest/activity cycles," says Hicks. Studies show that people do not perform as well during those hours. In fact, most traffic accidents occur in the late afternoon. You can't fight the midday doldrums, but you can work around them. For example, don't schedule an important meeting during this time. If possible, coordinate your child's nap with your own downtime. Going with the flow



# Schedule your downtime to coincide with your child's nap.

mechanisms, including heart rate and respiration, slow down, allowing your body to refuel," explains sleep researcher Rod J. Hughes, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychiatry at Oregon Health Sciences University, in Portland. Sleep also enhances your ability to reason and handle anxiety and stress.

Feeling rested depends on two things. The first is how

when she does. "A baby's circadian clock—an internal pacemaker in the brain that signals your body to sleep at night and be awake during the day—isn't set until she's about 3 months old," says Hughes. Interestingly, a woman's circadian clock drifts away from the norm when she gives birth, nature's way of accommodating the erratic sleep patterns

of psychology at San Jose State University. If you've spent the day nursing your 3-year-old's ear infection, have dinner with a friend or read a good book.

**Troubleshoot.** If you are coping with a chronic problem, such as financial worries or a marital rift, "deal with it now," says Hicks. Curb spending or see a counselor, for in-

rather than against it is considerably less exhausting. □

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