

## Nutrition

# A bowl of energy

## The top five nutrients to fuel your system if you're feeling sluggish

by Bijal Thoda

**D**o you feel you need several cups of coffee to wake you up and get you through the day? Do you slump in the afternoon or feel too tired to fix your dinner? If so, a bowl of sustained energy could be what you need. Here are the top five nutrients to put in that bowl:

### 1. Complex carbohydrates

A diet containing too much protein and fat or too few calories tends to be low in fibre-rich carbohydrates that fuel your system, leading to fatigue and eventual burnout. Since fibre also helps regulate your bowels, being low on fibre may mean irregular bowel habits that could leave you feeling sluggish. So, if lately your meals have consisted of a couple of eggs for breakfast, sausage with mashed potatoes for lunch, and tuna or beef burger for dinner, you may be missing out on complex carbohydrates and energy.

Try these instead:

- ▶ Add in a slice of whole grain toast into your egg breakfast routine. Swap the mashed potatoes with a mixed vegetable-chickpea salad. Tuck the tuna or beef into a whole grain wrap or pita for an energizing meal, or simply have a bowl of strawberries for dessert.
- ▶ Combine equal amounts of raw unsalted nuts—like almonds, pecans, walnuts, hazelnuts, or cashews—with raw unsalted pumpkin, sunflower, or sesame seeds, and dried fruits like raisins and figs, for a nutritious fibre- and mineral-rich snack on the go.
- ▶ If all food groups do provide us with energy, then what's wrong with opting for a pizza or cookie? The answer is that while these fast foods provide energy, the pattern in which they do is pretty shaky. Processed carbohydrates such as white bread, pasta, sugar laden pies, pastries, cereals, and cookies have little fibre and high amounts of sugar in them; they cause a sudden peak in your energy levels, followed by a crash. This, in turn, can lead to more cravings. Before you know it, you could be in a vicious cycle of short-lived buzz alternating with a feeling of tiredness, leaving you drained out in the end.
- ▶ Select whole grain over processed carbohydrates, since they have a much higher fibre content that helps balance your blood sugar levels, which means sustained energy levels. Yet another reason to reach out for old-fashioned whole grain oats and leave the sugar- and honey-coated cereals aside.

### 2. Magnesium

Magnesium is one of the top nutrients that can help control blood sugar levels and support muscle function and your immune system.

That translates into relaxed, calmer nerves and stronger muscles. We all know how tensed muscles can make us feel stressed and tired.

Magnesium is found in nuts, seeds, green leafy vegetables, and whole grain.

Try this:

- ▶ Add a handful of raw unsalted pumpkin seeds to your breakfast cereal for a burst of mineral-packed crunch and energy.

### 3. Iron

Fatigue and oxygen don't go hand-in-hand. We need iron to oxygenate our body cells. Lack of iron can make us look pale, and can cause shortness of breath and exhaustion. Iron is present in a variety of plants—enriched grains, beans/lentils, pumpkin seeds, fruits, and vegetables—and animal based foods, such as liver, clams, mussels, oysters, turkey, and sardines.

Because iron found in plant-based foods is relatively less absorbable than the iron found in animal-based foods, adding a source of vitamin C can increase the uptake of iron by the body.

Try these:

- ▶ Combine a bowl of iron-rich or fortified cereal breakfast with a glass of orange juice.
- ▶ Mix a serving of steamed lentils with freshly chopped peppers and steamed broccoli.
- ▶ Avoid complementing these with tea, coffee, or red wine! They slow down the absorption of iron.

### 4. Vitamin B complex

Vitamin B complex is a set of B vitamins that have individual functions, but work together to enable our system to break down food into usable energy; that's necessary for organ function and growth leading to increased vitality and health. Since the B vitamins are water soluble, we need to consume them daily—unlike some of the other vitamins—or you run the risk of a deficiency. The good news is that they're readily available in a variety of foods such as whole grains, green vegetables, legumes, nuts and seeds, dairy, eggs, meat, and yeast.

Try this:

- ▶ Slice a banana into your breakfast cereal or smoothie for an added energy boost. No time to prep? Add a handful of raw pumpkin seeds into your lunch salad, or a can of beans or frozen vegetables into your soup. It can be that simple!

### 5. Omega 3 fatty acids

Omega 3 fats are popular “good” fats and good energizers. Low levels of omega 3 fats are associated with chronic fatigue syndrome. Some of the best sources are oily fish, flax seeds, avocados, walnuts, and raw pumpkin seeds. While being a