

Out of Energy?

See nine things that zap your vitality and how to get it back

By [Denise Schipani](#) Posted October 09, 2009 from [Woman's Day](#); [November 3, 2009](#)

It's 3 p.m.—do you know where your energy's gone? You probably expect to feel that late-afternoon drag, but you don't always have to. Turns out, some of your regular habits may be sneakily zapping your zip. Fix some or all of these energy stealers, and you just may be feeling brighter this afternoon.

Energy Zapper #1: Being Addicted to E-mail

Isn't being wired to the hilt—e-mail, voice mail, IM, BlackBerry—supposed to boost productivity, freeing up your energy? More often, the opposite is true. If you continually halt what you're doing to answer e-mail, check voice mail, and attend to a thousand other beeps and blips, your attention becomes diluted, which leaves you feeling depleted.

There are two things going on here, says John Salerno, MD, a New York City family [physician](#) and director of the Salerno Center for Complementary Medicine. "The brain needs a lot of physical and mental energy to multitask, which gets drained," he says. And continually redirecting your attention from the BlackBerry to other stimuli siphons more energy and distracts your brain further.

Energy Fix

Switch off electronic gadgets during your most productive work hours, which for most people tend to be in the morning, says Laura Stack, author of *The Exhaustion Cure*. As for e-mail, try to limit yourself to checking it once every hour, instead of hopping to whenever it beeps. (Hint: Turn off the beep sound.) If something pops into your mind that you need to remember—call back your mom, e-mail the soccer coach about the snack schedule—write it down and take care of it later.

Energy Zapper #2: Visual Clutter

We may be used to living in enclosed spaces with lots of stuff—a refrigerator door packed with artwork, a



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countertop laden with mail, a desk that's little more than a shifting pile of folders and paper—but it's not how we're meant to live, says Dr. Salerno. "Clutter signals disorder, which makes us anxious. Our brains sense that [anxiety](#)."

Energy Fix

Do your best to clear visual clutter, so when you look around, your eyes can "rest" rather than dart from mess to mess, says Janice Ash, organization expert and owner of [I Declutter!](#). Instead of layering papers on a bulletin board, leave a small border of space around them. Clear the front of the fridge of all but the most current kids' artwork, and make a habit of leaving the kitchen counter stuff-free before bed each night.

Energy Zapper #3: Being Bored

Ever sat around for an hour or more not tackling a chore or work because it's just so darned monotonous? Mental foot-dragging, boredom and lack of motivation are draining, says Dr. Salerno. "Put simply, we like to see results, and getting things done gives us a mental energy boost." So avoiding tasks deprives you of that high.

Energy Fix

Find a partner for encouragement—a friend, a coworker—and call or e-mail to enlist her in a time challenge. "Say, 'I'll check back in with you in an hour, and we'll see if we've gotten these reports/organizing chores done.'" Or promise yourself motivational rewards for completing the task at hand, suggests Dr. Salerno.

Energy Zapper #4: Poor Posture

You already know that not sitting or standing straight is bad for your [body](#). But all that hunching over a computer screen or cradling a phone on your shoulder wreaks havoc on your energy level, too, says Pia Martin, a San Diego health and wellness chiropractor. "When you sit for long periods, you tend to slump forward, leading to rounded shoulders and a tilted lower spine. Your muscles contract, and blood flow is impaired," which limits the amount of oxygen to your brain.

Energy Fix

Sit up straight! Your legs should be at right angles to the floor, your arms at right angles to your keyboard. Be conscious of keeping your shoulders down, not up near your ears. Adjust your computer screen so your eyes gaze at the middle of it. And don't just sit there—if you have to, set a timer to go off hourly to remind you to get up, stretch and get a drink of water. When you get back to your desk, do a quick posture check: Shoulders down!

Energy Zapper #5: Toxic Indoor Air

Humming copy machines. Cleaning products. Dry-cleaning chemicals. Synthetic carpeting. Even the desks in your office may be contributing to the load of toxins you breathe each day, because all of them release chemicals into the air. "No one knows for sure how much harm these cause to our bodies, but they do build up over time, and can drain your energy by potentially interfering with thyroid function and overloading the body's detox system," says Frank Lipman, MD, a New York City physician and author of *Spent: End Exhaustion and Feel Great Again*.

Energy Fix

Get outside. If you're feeling tired, go out for 10 minutes to breathe fresh air. Indoors, cultivate houseplants, which are remarkably good at absorbing toxins. And don't wear shoes inside the house—you're dragging not just dirt indoors on your soles, but pesticides and other harmful chemicals too.

Energy Zapper #6: Eating Too Much at Once

Consuming a big meal is always something that will cause a dip in energy later, but that effect is most noticeable in the afternoon because the slump happens at that reach-for-coffee-or-sugar hour: 3 p.m. Here's what happens: You fill up on a carb- and calorie-rich lunch and, as nutrients are absorbed by your

body, excess glucose is dumped into your bloodstream, and your body releases insulin to process all that sugar. “A better idea is to spread out what and how you eat throughout the day to keep energy levels steady,” says Gloria Tsang, RD, founder of the nutrition website HealthCastle.com.

Energy Fix

Eat every four hours, instead of the usual six. To reform lunch, “try to brownbag more often than eating out,” says Tsang. It’s a fact that if you buy takeout or dine in a restaurant, you’re likely to eat more. Four hours after lunch, have a snack. If you’re going to eat dinner a couple of hours later, keep the snack small, such as half a turkey sandwich, or a yogurt and some crackers. Other ideas: Drink liquids (water, tea) all day. “Dehydration makes you tired, too,” says Tsang. If you usually have coffee right after lunch, try it a little later in the afternoon and make it a latte. The caffeine’s an obvious pick-me-up, but the little bit of fat and protein in the milk gives you a snack-like boost.

Energy Zapper #7: Living in Artificial Light

Our natural body rhythms are keyed to the rising and setting of the sun, says Carol Ash, DO, medical director of Sleep for Life, a sleep-disorder clinic in Somerset, New Jersey. When you open your eyes in the morning and get your first glimpse of sunlight, your brain receives a signal that helps it set its sleep-wake clock for the day. Similarly, seeing sunlight during the day gives your brain a boost. So if you are awake before the sun, and/or don’t see much sun all day, your body is experiencing something a lot like jet lag.

Energy Fix

Instead of hitting the coffee cart when you’re flagging, hit the sidewalk— the combination of physical exercise and a shot of sunlight will energize you. You don’t need much: “A 10- to 20-minute walk in the sunshine will give you a boost,” says Dr. Ash.

Energy Zapper #8: Listening to Negative Nellies

You may be upbeat, but it can be exhausting to listen to complainers all day long, whether it’s the fellow mom who calls to trash-talk the neighbors or the coworker who never has a positive word to say. It’s not your imagination: A 2006 study at Chicago’s Northwestern University found that people forced to listen to “high-maintenance” colleagues became frustrated and unfocused, and suffered a decline in the quality of their work.

Energy Fix

Insulate yourself as best you can. If a coworker loves to enumerate her complaints, cut her off with a firm but polite “I really have to get this finished,” then smile and get to work. She’ll get the message. If it’s your own negative thoughts that drag you down, train yourself to banish them by listing, daily, the things you’re grateful for, so you can pull out that list when the negative stuff intrudes.

Energy Zapper #9: Holding a Grudge

It takes a surprising amount of energy to remember whom you have a grudge against, and to continually update the faults, missteps and things you’re mad about. “Resentment is a huge drain physically as well as mentally,” says Dr. Lipman. “Anger, resentment, grudges— all of these emotions are toxic, and we hang on to them in our bodies especially in tense, tired muscles.”

Energy Fix

It takes practice, but try to forgive old mistakes. An easy way to start is to simply be aware of the times negative thoughts about others creep into your mind, says Dr. Lipman. “Think of others as flawed humans, which we all are,” which makes it easier to forgive—and free up energy.

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