

LISTEN TO YOUR GUT

Beating the low energy blues and chronic tiredness is as easy as a healthy and happy digestive system.

'I am a believer of one piece of fruit per day as fruit can have an effect on your hormonal balance and your blood sugar levels as well.'

Do you lack energy and feel tired although you have a healthy diet? Do you hit the wall at 3pm in the afternoon and crave a sugar hit? If you've answered yes, then you're not alone. These energy slumps are very much related to blood sugar levels and by monitoring our diet it's easy to kick the low energy blues away. Sydney based naturopath Victoria O'Sullivan says 'when that happens you always look back to what you ate for breakfast and midmorning and if you have had enough fuel to sustain your energy throughout the day.'

To keep blood sugars on an even keel, Victoria suggests to 'make sure you have a palm size of protein for breakfast, lunch and dinner and half that palm for midmorning and mid-afternoon snacks.' Try eggs and vegetables for breakfast or yoghurt with nuts and seeds and for protein snacks have a handful of nuts. But what happens when the symptoms continue even though you're been eating a good solid breakfast and a midmorning snack? Fatigue, along

with headaches, poor digestion and allergies, can usually be traced to a problem in the digestive system and is due to the gut's inability to absorb nutrients.

The main function of the digestive system is to break down the food we eat in to smaller molecules so that it can be absorbed in to the bloodstream and transported to cells or other storage areas in the body. However if it fails to function effectively, then our bodies may not be absorbing the essential nutrients needed for optimum performance.

Victoria uses the plastic bag analogy with her clients to explain and create a visual on what goes on in our digestive systems. 'Take what you had for dinner last night, put that in the blender plus anything you drank. Pour it in to a plastic bag, seal it and throw it outside in 35 or 37-degree heat. Leave it for a few days then go and see what is happening in the bag – imagine what it would look and smell like,' she says. This pretty much sums up what happens to the foods we eat.

VICTORIA O'SULLIVAN

(BHSc; Dip Naturopathy) is a leading Sydney-based naturopath with 14 years' experience in the wellness industry.

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ABOUT GUT ABSORPTION

'Usually clients come in and say that they are tired and need to lose a bit of weight, but on a closer inspection when you ask a few questions their digestive system is way out of whack,' she says.

So what actually causes our digestive systems to get 'out of whack'? Luckily most factors are often within our control such as poor diet, the overuse of antibiotics, chronic infections, food intolerances, stress and lack of proper digestive enzymes. These factors can alter the environment of the gut and thereby affect the proper breakdown of food which then passes in to the intestinal tract causing bloating and gas.

Victoria says that simple clues for malabsorption include 'low energy and being constantly tired. But bloating, gas, constipation, diarrhoea, burping, stomach cramps, gurgling, stomach pain, bad breath, and all that sort of stuff is going on in the digestive system as well.'

There are a couple of factors that

influence the inability of the gut to absorb nutrients. The major culprit is chewing food properly. Chewing food well and keeping it in the mouth longer allows food to be broken down by enzymes in the mouth and nutrients to be quickly released and assimilated. It also takes some pressure off the stomach as food has already been well broken down when it arrives. Chewing too little coupled with the eating environment, which often can be stressful, does not create ideal conditions. 'When you are really stressed, the blood moves away from the digestive organs which then leads to the inability to absorb nutrients,' says Victoria.

Taking foods out of the diet that aggravate the digestive system such as sugar, alcohol and caffeine and going back to the caveman way of eating i.e., protein, vegetables and salads is the best approach says Victoria. Eliminating

foods that cause gut sensitivity is important as it gives the body a chance to heal. 'You need to provide the right kind of environment to fix it and the right digestive enzymes to rehabilitate the gut.'

Foods such as probiotic-rich yogurt, sauerkraut and green leafy vegetables that are high in fibre and minerals, are ideal choices. Apple cider vinegar in water is like an aperitif and gets the enzymes and digestive system moving.

Just as losing weight is about balancing the energy in and the energy out equation through diet and exercise, the digestive system works on much the same principle, delivering the right nutrients to the right environment.

'Many things can cause fatigue but if you have digestive issues and start to get the gut to return to it's healthy balance, you can turn it around within days to a fortnight.'

SNACK SUGGESTIONS:

- + Cheese with celery and carrot sticks.
- + A ¼ cup of nuts (almonds, walnuts or brazil or macadamia nuts) and cheese.
- + Egg with cucumber.
- + Carrot sticks and hummus.

Good foods for a healthy gut:

- + Sauerkraut
- + Probiotic-rich yogurt
- + Green leafy vegetables
- + Proteins
- + Berries and seeds

Ideal breakfast suggestions:

- + Two eggs (poached, boiled or an omelette) with vegetables (spinach, tomato or mushrooms)
- + Natural yogurt with berries, nuts and seeds

'Look at Palaeolithic times and what they used to eat; stick to nuts, seeds and berries as that's what we are biochemically set up to do.'

