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shows us
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Good mood foods

Maximise your energy levels, de-stress, beat PMS and get a good night's sleep just by making a few simple changes to your diet By Lisa Oxenham. Photographed by Louisa Parry

PROBLEM: INSOMNIA

An overactive mind and body cause insomnia, so reduce your energy levels before bedtime by avoiding certain foods. "Don't go to bed with a full stomach and steer clear of stimulating foods such as pickles, tomatoes and chocolate," says psychiatrist Dr Michael T Isaac.

BEAT STRESS: BANANAS Ease any nerves or a stimulated mind by eating a banana, a great source of vitamin B, which is "essential in the function of many important enzymes in the nervous system," says Dr Isaac. Bananas are also the easiest fruit to digest.

RISE AND SHINE: MILLET CEREAL "Millet contains phosphorus, manganese, iron and vitamin A. After a restless night, [energising] phosphorus boosts alertness and physical energy," says Dr Isaac. For an invigorating breakfast, try Nature's Path Millet Rice Flakes, £2.19, at Sainsbury's (0845 301 2020).

CALM DOWN: LETTUCE Rapid fluctuations in sugar levels can inhibit relaxation. "Lettuce promotes a steady release of sugar," says Dr Isaac. "It also speeds up the absorption of [the body's own natural sleep-inducing chemical] tryptophan, increasing serotonin levels, which regulates your sleep cycle."

RELAX: HERBAL TEAS "Hops, passionflower, camomile and peppermint are all sleep-inducing," says Dr Isaac. Put a mixture of these in dried-leaf form into an infuser. "Valerian tea is also suggested for insomnia, nervous tension and stress." Try Sleepy Tea, £4.95, at Harvey Nichols (020 7201 8538).

STOP LEG CRAMPS: SWISS CHEESE Increasing your daily intake of calcium and magnesium, found in dairy products such as Swiss cheese will help to reduce cramps and also encourage the release of sleep hormones to aid a good, restful night's sleep.

TUCK IN: PORRIDGE "As well as having a low-glycaemic index, porridge is a low-calorie, high-bulk food that prevents sugar rushes before bed," says Dr Isaac. Prepare it with milk, rather than water.

DRINK UP: MILK Drink a cup of warm milk one and a half hours before bed. "Milk contains tryptophan, which is absorbed more easily when the milk is warm," says Dr Isaac. Turkey, tuna and peanut butter also contain tryptophan. ▶



PROBLEM: FATIGUE

“Physical and emotional burnout can lead to a weak immune system, food cravings and blurred vision,” says Dr Daniel Sister, nutritionist at London salon Beauty Works West, who counts **Lisa Snowden** as a regular. But instead of reaching for quick fixes such as caffeine or sweets, which can cause an energy slump, incorporate foods that will optimise your health and keep blood sugar levels stable.

CLEANSE YOUR SYSTEM: CELERY

Energy lulls can cause bloating and constipation. “Celery is energising and a natural diuretic that relieves bloating by eliminating toxins,” says Dr Sister.

PICK-ME-UP:

HONEY Fatigue can lead to depression, but honey stimulates the production of mood-lifting serotonin. It’s also a form of glucose – easily turned into energy.

STAY IN FOCUS:

GARLIC This well-known stimulant is excellent in cases of mental fatigue. It revs up the heart, cleanses the blood and improves blood flow to the brain.

REVITALISE:

CARROTS Lack of exercise can bring on a bout of constipation. Carrots, a good source of fibre, can relieve this and give a slow release of energy throughout the day.

KEEP WELL:

CABBAGE “Containing magnesium, iodine and vitamins, cabbage supports the immune system,” says Dr Sister. It also gets rid of toxins, helping the body’s metabolism work more efficiently.

SEE CLEARLY:

BLUEBERRIES When tired, the eye muscles are slower to contract and focus, so your vision blurs. “Blueberries are rich in iron and anthocyanin, which improves blood flow, helping the eyes function properly.



‘To boost energy, I stick to unrefined foods such as nuts and seeds, and wholemeal foods such as rye breads, brown rice, green vegetables and apples – they have a slower sugar release to keep blood sugar levels stable.’ **Isabella Hervey, inset**

PROBLEM: STRESS

"Stress triggers the production of adrenaline, which causes anxiety and heart palpitations," says Dr John Briffa, a specialist in integrated medicine. "And the hormone cortisol, also brought on by stress, causes suppression of the immune system, loss of calcium and the breakdown of protein in muscles." The following foods can calm your nerves and help keep illness at bay.



'Food that's high in magnesium is calming, so when I'm stressed, I go to Fresh & Wild and get a juice containing magnesium-rich green vegetables such as cucumber and spinach.'

Meg Mathews, inset

CEASE SUGAR CRAVINGS: APPLES Stress can lead to sugar and carbohydrate cravings. Reach for apples – they contain fibre, which tricks the brain into feeling full, they're not too rich and are easily digested. More importantly, they stabilise blood sugar levels, keeping energy up so you won't feel the need to snack.

COMBAT ANXIETY: ST JOHN'S WORT

Nicknamed the "herbal Valium", St John's wort contains hypericum – thought to be what makes it helpful for depression and anxiety. Try St John's Wort Capsules, £11.99, at Holland & Barrett (0870 606 6605). But consult your GP first if you are taking any other medication.

STABILISE ENERGY: BEANS "Beans and lentils deliver a sustained level of sugar into the bloodstream and help prevent stress reaction," says Dr Briffa. Opt for Nature's Harvest Red Kidney Beans, 59p, at Holland & Barrett.

FEED YOUR BRAIN: SALMON "It is rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which are important in the day-to-day running of the brain," says Dr Briffa. "A regular intake will help to normalise brain function and reduce stress and aggression." Fish oil capsules taken daily will have the same effect.

CALM SHAKINESS: LIQUORICE ROOT It helps the body adapt to stress and has a calming effect on nerves. It supports the adrenal (stress) glands, and also prevents stress-induced fatigue. Try Liquorice Root, £3.50, at Harvey Nichols (020 7201 8538).

EASE TENSION: SEEDS "Magnesium, found in seeds, is known for its soothing effect on the nervous system," says Dr Briffa. Pumpkin seeds are also high in zinc, great for combating lethargy. A couple of handfuls a day of Nature's Harvest Pumpkin Seeds, 95p, at Holland & Barrett, will do.

IRON THINGS OUT: RED MEAT/SPINACH "If you are low in iron, you feel tired and run down a lot of the time and can become distressed without knowing the cause," says Dr Briffa. You may benefit from red meat or spinach – both are rich in iron. ▶



PROBLEM: PMS

"As many as four out of five women suffer from PMS, with symptoms ranging from depression to fluid retention and weight gain. They can begin as early as a fortnight before a period – slowly getting worse," says Dr Isaac, author of *Eat Yourself Happy* (Carroll & Brown, £12.99). "Adapting your diet around that time will help," adds raw food nutritionist Karen Knowler.

CALM IRRITABILITY: ALMONDS

Rich in B vitamins and magnesium, nuts help to boost serotonin levels. "Make a nut milk by blending almonds with water, then strain. To sweeten, add some blended dates," says Knowler.

ENHANCE HAPPINESS: BROWN RICE

"A lack of B vitamins can lead to a wide range of PMS symptoms," says Knowler. "Whole grains deliver these vitamins and keep blood sugar levels stable, lightening your mood."

RECHARGE: WATERCRESS

Heavy blood loss during your period can cause anaemia and an iron deficiency, leaving you feeling washed out. Knowler suggests eating watercress and other raw green leafy vegetables – all rich in iron.

DON'T BLOAT: WATERMELON

Tackle fluid retention and constipation with watermelon – a great source of fibre and water. "Eat it before main meals, not as dessert, or it will lead to more bloating due to fermentation," says Knowler.

STOP SWEET CRAVINGS: DATES

Sugary foods give a quick fix if you need a mood-enhancing boost before your period, yet dates and other dried fruits will not only satisfy your sweet tooth, but fill you with B vitamins and iron.

BALANCE YOUR HORMONES: MACA

"This herb can eradicate nearly all PMS symptoms," says Knowler. Take a tablespoon of the malty powder daily throughout the month or try Maca Capsules, £15, by The Organic Pharmacy (020 7351 2232).



RELIEVE BREAST PAIN: EVENING PRIMROSE OIL

Rich in omega-6 fatty acids, it can ease premenstrual breast tenderness. Take Evening Primrose Oil Capsules, from £2.29, at Holland & Barrett (0870 606 6605).



"When I have PMT, a bit of chocolate helps. I eat Green & Black's, it's 70% cocoa so you don't need as much."

Jayne Middlemiss, inset ■