

## **Exercise For The Exhausted**

*Fatigue can be a roadblock to physical activity. Here are 9 ways to get more energized.*

Fatigue is one of the many reasons people skip or cut short their workouts. But unlike true physical exhaustion, fatigue is a perception—and your perceptions can be changed. By modifying the self-inflicted factors that contribute to this sense of tiredness, you can make exercise seem easier, which will help you to do it more often and enjoyably. What's more, exercise itself can make you feel less fatigued and more energized.

We combed through the research and spoke with exercise scientists to compile the set of fatigue-fighting tips below. You'll still probably break a sweat (and that's a good thing; you'll benefit your heart and build muscle). But over time you should feel less tired and function better during workouts.

1. **Eat carbohydrates.** Low-carb diets are popular, but they aren't ideal for exercise. Having insufficient carbohydrates in your system keeps your body from getting the maximum benefit of strength-based activities, such as weight lifting or running sprints, according to a 2004 review in the journal *Nutrition & Metabolism*. Low-carb eaters can also experience increased levels of fatigue from exercise. That's why diets such as the Atkins plan aren't recommended for athletes. If you plan to work out and it has been more than three hours since you last ate, fuel up by eating a banana or a whole-wheat bagel with peanut butter. Try to stay away from refined, simple carbohydrates like white bread. "The optimal workout fuel is complex carbohydrates, such as legumes, starchy vegetables, and whole-grain breads and cereals," says Carla Sottovia, Ph.D., the director of fitness and personal-training education at the Cooper Fitness.
2. **Drink more water.** When you're dehydrated, your cardiovascular system feels the effects, weakening the flow of blood to your muscles and decreasing your energy. Replenish your fluids before, during, and after exercise, and bump up the amount if you sweat heavily or the air temperature is high. Sensations of thirst might not be enough to signal when you need to drink, since that mechanism can be impaired in older adults and people who take certain over-the-counter or prescription drugs.
3. **Keep a diary.** Tracking your activity and success will help motivate you, just as a calorie log helps a dieter. "Physical changes occur very gradually, so a lot of times, people don't see the benefits in a visual way," says Carol Ewing Garber, Ph.D., an associate professor of movement sciences at Teachers College of Columbia University in New York. "But when you keep track of the numbers, you will be surprised at how motivating the markers are." Consider recording such things as your waist circumference, the total amount of time you exercise, the distance covered during cardiovascular training, and number of reps, sets, and pounds lifted during strength training.
4. **Find a partner.** It can push you to do more than you would alone and make you more accountable, Sottovia says. It doesn't hurt if that buddy is in better shape than you are. A

2010 study in the Journal of Social Sciences found that when men and women biked with another rider who was more highly trained, they exercised harder even when instructed to keep a moderate pace. If a person trained with a cyclist below his or her fitness level, performance declined. If you don't have a buddy available, try using some of the newer exercise machines that offer virtual training partners and other interactive features. "Anything that takes your mind off the work can get you to move faster without realizing it," Sottovia says.

5. **Listen to music.** It makes exercise more fun, and like a training partner can distract you and reduce your perception of effort. But it also stimulates our innate tendency to move in time with sound, according to a 2010 article from the American Council on Exercise. Choose songs you really enjoy to encourage you to work out longer.
6. **Exercise in the afternoon.** Joints and muscles loosen up during the course of a person's waking hours, so people with arthritis or stiff joints might find it more comfortable to exercise later in the day. But try not to train within three hours of bedtime. Body temperature rises during exercise and can take several hours to drop, which could delay sleep. Of course, exercise at any time of day is better than no exercise, so if you're a morning person, you don't have to change your workout timing. But do start with a good warm-up.
7. **Mind your breathing.** For weight training, exhale during the resistance ("lifting") phase of the exercise and inhale as you return to the starting position. Never hold your breath. For cardiovascular training, try to breathe from your belly or chest, and not while lifting your shoulders, which Sottovia says is common among type-A people, who are often very stressed.
8. **Mix it up.** Repetitive training can cause boredom and fatigue. If you are a member of a fitness club, Sottovia recommends using a different cardio machine on every visit and changing your weight-lifting program every four weeks. "This will also increase the benefits, since you'll be regularly working different muscle groups," she says. If needed, consult a personal trainer.
9. **Turn off late-night television.** Going to bed late makes it harder to get the eight hours of sleep at night that most people need. It also increases the risk of daytime drowsiness, which can get in the way of your commitment to exercise. If you're running on limited sleep and start to feel extra fatigued during exercise, reduce the duration or intensity for that day to give your body.

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