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MyHealthTALK

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October is Breast Cancer
Awareness Month



Boosting Energy in a SAD Season

Fatigue. Exhaustion. All-out energy drain. We've all been there more often than we wish. It seems the older we become, the more we struggle against it. Our get-up-and-go gets up and leaves...and it doesn't take us with it. Sometimes, it doesn't matter how enticing a new movie, event or social occasion is; we're just too worn out to get there.

Enter fall—with its shorter days and diminishing daylight. Seasonal variations in light can further zap our energy and plunk us into a seasonal funk. When daylight savings time ends on November 4, millions of Americans may already be experiencing seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a mood disorder related to changes in light and our biological clock (circadian rhythm). Symptoms of SAD may include depression, low energy, moodiness and changes in sleep and eating patterns. SAD can leave us feeling physically exhausted, unable to concentrate, frustrated and cranky.

If any of these symptoms sound familiar, take heart. Although energy zappers are everywhere, there are a number of ways to energize and fight the seasonal blahs. Try one or more of the suggestions listed below to boost your energy and minimize symptoms of SAD.

Let the Sun Shine

When you get up in the morning, turn on bright indoor lights to wake up your brain. Open your curtains and let the sun in. Exposure to light stimulates your brain to stop producing melatonin, the hormone that makes you sleepy. Outdoor and artificial light take your body out of sleep mode by resetting your brain's 24-hour biological clock.

If you think you may suffer from SAD, you may want to consider using a light therapy box, a proven treatment for SAD that has little or no side effects, according to Mayo Clinic. SAD sufferers typically relieve symptoms within a few days by sitting or working in front of a light therapy box for 30 minutes daily. If you suffer from serious depression, consult your physician before obtaining a light box and use it according to doctor's recommendations. Light boxes can be purchased without a prescription; however, some insurance companies cover the cost if your doctor prescribes light therapy. The devices are also known as bright light therapy and phototherapy boxes, and range in price from \$150 to \$500.

Laugh until it Hurts

Laughter discharges 'happy chemicals' that can energize you when feeling sluggish. Laughing releases endorphins, curbs anxiety, strengthens your immune system, and gives you an energy boost by pumping up your blood pressure and heart rate. A good laugh helps people bond and is often contagious, multiplying laughter's happy paybacks.



Indeed, when you laugh, it's the one time when being phony can be a good thing. Your body can't tell the difference between a genuine laugh and a fake one. So, even if your laughter is forced, you receive the same health benefits as if you were reacting to something that really did crack you up.

Shake Up Your Routine

When you experience something new or rewarding, your brain releases a rush of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that makes you more alert and motivated. There's no need for a morning sky dive—just find something ordinary to switch up. If you're right-handed, use your left hand to brush your teeth or comb your hair.

Get Up and Get Moving

It may seem counter-intuitive, but using energy gives you more of it. Exercise on a regular basis leads to immediate and long-term, higher energy levels. In addition to giving you more energy and stamina, exercise improves sleep patterns and helps with weight control. According to a study in *Personality and Social Psychology*, a 10-minute walk boosts your energy for the next two hours. Morning workouts trigger feel-good endorphins and reduce stress hormones. Check with your doctor before beginning any new exercise routine, and always exercise to the point of refreshment—not exhaustion.



Power Nap

Information overload and mental strain can drain energy. Studies by the National Institutes of Mental Health found that a 60-minute "power nap" may reverse the mind-numbing effects of information overload while helping you retain what you have just learned.

Drink Water

If you drink water throughout the day, it will naturally keep things flowing—including your energy. Keep your body hydrated by drinking at least six-8-ounce glasses of water daily. Your body cannot function at full capacity without an adequate amount of H₂O. The first sign of dehydration is fatigue.

Eat Healthy

To maintain optimal energy, your body requires nutritious food and a balanced intake of proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and water. A balanced diet includes five food groups, vegetables, fruit, grains, protein and dairy, which provide energy and help regulate your bodily functions. Studies have shown that consuming omega-3 fatty acids improves brain function, which can help prevent a midday slump.

Avoid Energy Drainers

Smoking, drinking alcohol, and other unhealthy lifestyle habits, financial or family problems, negative relationships, television news and many things can rob you of energy. Take steps to identify at least one energy drainer in your life and work to eliminate it. You'll feel better and have more pep.

Kid's Salt Intake Risks Hypertension

New research finds that children consume too much salt and are beginning to pay a price for it with high or elevated blood pressure. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) studied the diets of 6,200 children and found that they are consuming as much salt as adults, which similarly increases their risks for hypertension, heart disease and premature death.

High salt intake contributes to 800,000 deaths each year from high blood pressure that leads to heart disease, stroke or other vascular diseases. American diets obtain almost two-thirds of their sodium (62.5%) from processed, store-bought food, and one-quarter (24.9%) from restaurant food, including fast food and pizza.

CDC researchers found that high blood pressure risks were greatest among the 37% of American children who are overweight or obese—their risks for developing high blood pressure were triple compared to children with healthy weights. Among children studied between the ages of 8 and 18, 15 percent had either high blood pressure or slightly elevated blood pressure (prehypertension).

The recommended daily salt intake for children and adults is no more than 2,300 milligrams, which is about one teaspoon daily. Researchers found that the average daily salt intake for children studied was 3,400 milligrams. Adults consume an average of 3,300 milligrams of salt each day. The CDC reports that 9 out of 10 Americans use too much sodium.

In the government-funded National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, children came to mobile sites where they were asked detailed questions about what they had eaten in the previous 24 hours. Their blood pressure was measured three separate times to ensure consistent readings. The CDC findings were published online in the Sept. 17 issue of *Pediatrics*.



Common High Salt Sources

Food type	Percent daily sodium contribution
Breads and rolls	7.4%
Cold cuts/cured meats	5.1%
Pizza	4.9%
Poultry	4.5%
Soups	4.3%
Hamburgers and other sandwiches	4.0%
Cheese	3.8%
Pasta mixed dishes	3.3%
Meat mixed dishes	3.2%
Chips, pretzels, and other savory snacks	3.1%

Parents Can Thrive in Empty Nest

Parents with their last or only child heading off to college or a job far away can take steps to minimize the effects of 'empty nest' syndrome. It is normal for parents to have mixed emotions, such as sadness and loss, when their last child leaves home, said University of Indianapolis psychologist Kelly Miller. Although parents may encourage a son or daughter to be independent, when it comes time to let go, the experience can be painful.



Parents with only one child and those strongly identifying with their role as parent may have a particularly difficult time adjusting to an empty nest. Focusing on the positive can ease the transition.

An empty nest can provide parents with many advantages, Miller said. Partners have opportunities to reconnect with each other and rekindle interests for which they may not have had time. Scheduling regular movie, dinner and date nights, taking classes, or returning to recreation and hobbies that have been set aside during child-rearing years can help parents thrive. Miller advises parents to keep in close contact with their child and seek support from friends or a counselor if coping is difficult.

Empty nesters need to keep in mind that the relationship with their child is not ending. They will remain an important source of wisdom and support as their child faces new challenges and develops his or her adult identity. Kelly advises against making any immediate, major lifestyle changes, such as selling the family home or taking an extended vacation because parents and their children have a greater need for stability when a child has moved away.

Most importantly, Miller said, empty nesters should expect both good and bad experiences and learn to roll with them. One way to handle unexpected events is to maintain a sense of humor and stay flexible. When parents change their perspective from "loss" to "opportunity," it helps them adapt to the transition.