

HEALING & WELLNESS

# Thirst for Energy

Stimulant-packed drinks aren't the only way to fight fatigue.

By ERIN BRERETON



You're exhausted but the day's just begun. What's your first impulse? Time out. Before you reach for that cup of coffee or an energy drink, consider your options.

For refreshing caffeine-free beverage recipes approved by CTCA dietitians, [click here](#).

Fatigue can be a common side effect of cancer treatment and, depending on the individual patient, it can develop before, immediately after or even weeks after treatment, says Jessica Moore, a naturopathic oncology provider at Cancer Treatment Centers of America® (CTCA) in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Feeling fatigue is different than feeling tired because resting and sleeping don't help—and fatigue can last for a few days or even months. To pep up, some turn to drinks loaded with caffeine. Clinicians, however, often favor another approach.

"Coffee is not going to fix the cause of the fatigue; it's happening because something else is going on," Moore says. "We try to address the underlying cause. To determine why a patient's energy level has decreased, treatment team members look at a number of factors, including cancer type, treatment, other health issues, medications, diet, lifestyle, emotional wellness and social circumstances."

Some simple but often under-recognized causes might be:

**Dehydration:** Fluid intake is particularly important to ensure proper blood flow to your organs, says clinical nutrition and culinary manager Karen Sudders, MS, RD, LDN, CSO, at CTCA® in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Without ample hydration, you may feel lethargic.

If patients have adequate kidney function, Moore recommends they drink half their body weight in ounces of water each day, starting with 8 ounces of filtered water within half an hour to two hours of waking up.

"After fasting all night, while you are asleep, you need to rehydrate in the morning," she says. "The idea is to consistently maintain hydration; it's so important for everything from energy to mental clarity to kidney and cardiovascular function."

**Inertia:** Movement improves circulation, helps reduce stress hormones, supports a healthy immune system and can support healthy sleep. Research shows that gentle restorative exercise like tai chi, a traditional Chinese health-promoting exercise, can decrease general fatigue and physical fatigue and increase vigor.<sup>1</sup>

**Poor nutrition:** Skipping meals, eating too much at once or eating meals that aren't nutritionally balanced can throw off blood sugar and potentially cause an energy drop.

Similarly, insufficient calorie intake, which is sometimes a problem for patients struggling with nausea, can affect energy by disrupting sleep patterns.

To keep blood sugar at a constant level throughout the day, Sudders recommends eating every three to four hours. Eating smaller, more frequent meals can also help combat stomach upset and ensure that you consume an adequate amount of calories. "Having something, instead of nothing, in your system helps control nausea, instead of exacerbating it," she says.

Dietitians work with patients to ensure they're getting enough macronutrients—carbohydrates, fats, proteins and other key nutrients—because deficiencies can impact energy status.<sup>2</sup>

### But ... I Love My Coffee

It's true, coffee, energy drinks and other beverages brimming with central nervous stimulants like caffeine and taurine<sup>3</sup> may initially make you feel more alert. But they can have additional impact on your health, according to Moore, such as possibly raising your blood pressure, creating an imbalance in blood sugar, causing it to rise or fall, increasing anxiety or causing sleep disturbances.

"Caffeine can be a really strong stimulant," she says. "When people already get it from other sources, like tea and chocolate, it's easy to get way too much."

If you're a fervent coffee fan, Sudders says an occasional cup shouldn't derail your progress. Moderation, however, is key. She recommends keeping your total caffeine intake—of coffee, green tea or other beverages—to no more than three 6- to 8-ounce servings a day.

"A drink isn't bad or awful just because it has caffeine in it," Sudders says. "But it's something to be mindful of." Click here for the [Chia Smoothie](#) recipe shown.

\* [Environmental Working Group's Dirty Dozen](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Tai Chi](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Macronutrients](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Taurine](#)

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