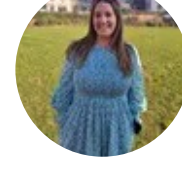


HEALTH

This Ayurvedic regime will help banish the afternoon slump and leave you feeling so energised

Mid-afternoon energy boost.



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There are some days when, no matter how much sleep you've had the night before, you'll experience that much-loathed, post-lunch afternoon slump.

If you're struggling - even after an afternoon espresso - to refocus, an Ayurvedic-inspired regime designed to boost your post-lunchtime energy might be the solution.

Ayurvedic-inspired book, [Prajna by Mira Manek](#), is packed full of Ayurvedic rituals and routines for the entire day, from energy boosting hacks to kickstart your day, to night-time practices that'll ensure an incredible night of sleep.

Here, Mira shares her top tips for boosting your afternoon energy slump...

Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate!

Dehydration can cause tiredness; in fact, it is one of the main causes of tiredness. Your alertness and mood are all affected if you're not drinking enough water. An easy way to see if you're having enough water is by checking the colour of your urine: pale yellow means you're hydrating well whereas dark yellow probably means you need more water. Keep a large bottle by your desk and keep refilling it. Add a squeeze of lemon if you want to enhance the flavour and aid digestion. If you're keeping a bottle there but forgetting to drink the water, stick a 'Drink Me' label on it, or buy a brightly coloured bottle, so it attracts your attention. Or even set a reminder on your phone.

Sometimes, it's the simplest things that will get you into the habit. Once you get used to drinking more water, you'll realise how much you need it and so you will naturally start reaching for it. Will coffee really wake me up? One of those quick-fix answers, a well-deserved break, an excuse to get fresh air, coffee is often the first thing we think of to tackle that mid-afternoon slump. However, caffeine is very dehydrating and therefore, if a lack of water is the cause of your tiredness, you'll be dehydrating yourself even more by drinking coffee. Your body also becomes used to the caffeine fix very quickly so you might feel you need more coffee over time to give you that same effect.

Furthermore, if it's late in the afternoon, your night-time sleep might get affected, as it takes 3–5 hours for your body to eliminate half of the caffeine and longer to eliminate the rest. Even if you're the kind of person that sleeps very well, it could disrupt the amount of deep sleep you get or make you a little restless during the night, preventing you from getting the optimum level of sleep you need. If you think you need coffee, but you know you might be having too much, then have one or two cups less each day and replace it with something else.

Here's a few options: **Matcha** This green powder made from ground green tea leaves has been used by monks for centuries to keep alert during meditation. Matcha has a similar amount of caffeine to a cup of brewed coffee, and only slightly less than an espresso, but the buzz is more energising and longer-lasting. It also calms the mind, is brimming with antioxidants and tastes delicious with either water or milk. You could stir matcha into hot water, add a dash of cinnamon and then add a little cold milk (any milk) over the top. Many cafes now make matcha lattes.

Cacao: Cacao in hot water is my preferred drink on days when I'm craving chocolate but don't want to eat a lot of sugar. Cocoa or raw cacao is so rich and full of flavour. Just stir a teaspoon into hot water. You could of course stir this into hot milk, rather like having a very pure hot chocolate. If you need a touch of sweetness, add some honey or maple syrup. I often add peppermint essential oil to this – it's great for the belly!

Turmeric: A little turmeric in milk or even hot water is another great way of satisfying a craving for something warming and soothing. Turmeric has a whole range of benefits, but at this time of day it can improve the mind's ability to focus, since it increases the levels of growth hormone in the brain.

Tummy tip: if you get stomach pains or cramps, buy a bottle of peppermint essential oil and add one or two drops to your preferred drink.

Have I eaten too much for lunch?

Have you eaten more than usual or had something different today? The stomach might still be in the process of digesting your meal, and with all the blood rushing to the colon, there's not enough blood flowing to the brain, hence the sleepiness. If this is the case, consider reducing the quantity of your lunch or changing what you're eating and see what feels better. Remember to always chew well. If tiredness persists, you could start keeping a diary of exactly what you're eating everyday and making a note of how you feel during the day. This would be very useful if you were then to see a nutritionist, naturopath, Chinese doctor or Ayurvedic practitioner so that you can figure out the root cause of the issue.

Checking for deficiencies

If tiredness is constant, get a blood test and check for iron levels, vitamin D, vitamin [B12](#) and [magnesium](#). A deficiency in any of these can result in tiredness. Ideally, we want to get all our vitamins and minerals from our food but it can be difficult to get and to absorb the levels that we need.

Vegetarians and vegans are more likely to be low in iron and therefore more likely to be anemic compared to meat eaters. This is because red meats are very high in iron. Greens, dark leafy greens and eggs are also good sources of iron. The main symptoms of iron deficiency is exhaustion and sleepiness. If you're taking supplements, be aware that iron tablets can cause constipation; liquid iron is easier on the stomach.

Vitamin D is absorbed through the skin. Darker skin has more of the pigment melanin, which can reduce the absorption of vitamin D. Therefore, while there are foods containing vitamin D, such as fish and milk, it might not be enough for those with darker skin – especially if they're living in areas where the sun is weaker. A vitamin D supplement will certainly help in this case.

Magnesium deficiency can cause insomnia and restless sleep, and can heighten stress levels; stress also depletes the body of magnesium. We can get magnesium from dark leafy greens, milk, seeds and nuts, meats and unprocessed whole grains, but we may not be eating enough, or our body may not be absorbing the nutrients properly. A supplement can make a difference to your sleep and stress levels.

Since the main source of vitamin B12 is meat and dairy, vegetarians and vegans are more likely to be deficient in B12. This vitamin is needed to produce healthy red blood cells and so a deficiency can cause anemia. It also becomes harder for the body to absorb B12 as you get older.

Vitamin B12 injections are the most effective, but you can also take a supplement.

Going for a walk

A quick walk will get your heart rate up, improve blood circulation and give you more energy. The access to sunlight will also make you feel more awake. Take some long, deep breaths or practice ujjayi breathing as you walk, which will send more oxygen to the brain and energise you.

Using scents

Just as a strong smell of coffee might be enough to wake you up in the morning, there are certain scents that are known to have energising effects. Carrying a couple of essential oils with you or leaving them by your desk might be just the thing you need when you're falling asleep in the middle of the day. Citrus scents like lemon and grapefruit are great for mental stimulation and help boost the happy hormone serotonin; peppermint has a rejuvenating and awakening effect; while rosemary is a memory booster and makes us more alert. If you have a headache Both stress and dehydration are common triggers of tension-type headaches and migraines. Here's a few simple remedies to help ease your headache:

- Massage the points where the brows and nose meet
 - Walk outside to get some fresh air and oxygen
 - Slow down the breathing and take deep breaths
 - Use peppermint essential oil to massage the temples
 - Magnesium is known to be very effective in helping reduce headaches
 - Sip on fresh ginger tea or stir ground ginger into hot water
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Mix together a little ground ginger with water to form a paste, lie on your back and rub on your forehead and temples, then rest for 15 minutes or as long as you can I would also suggest looking into craniosacral therapy which is a gentle holistic therapy manipulating the pressure and circulation of cerebrospinal fluid, the fluid that surrounds and cushions the brain and spinal cord. This calms the central nervous system and is very relaxing. Marma therapy would also be very effective if you can find a good marma therapist.

Pick-me-up snacks

Sometimes, when you haven't had a filling lunch or you know you're going to work late and therefore dinner might be later than usual, you may need something small to keep you going, to give you a little more energy and fill that hunger. Here's a few simple snack options that you can take with you to work:

A mix of nuts, seeds and raisins, prunes or apricots
Yoghurt with chia seeds, flaxseeds and nuts and a little honey
Walnuts and a few pieces of dark chocolate
Apple, pear or a small bowl of mixed fruits
Dates with nuts or dates with almond butter or any nut butter
Avocado on rye or any crackerbreads with salt, pepper and lemon. This is really simple as you can just take the ingredients with you and prepare your snack at work
Yoghurt pot with avocado, salt, pepper, roasted nuts, perhaps with some baked crisps as a side
Dates and other dried fruits contain fibre, vitamins and minerals For example, dates are high in iron and in B vitamins, which are both great for energy. Their fibre content is beneficial for digestion. The key is balance and knowing your body! Indulging now and again is totally fine but it is also important to practise restraint and have resolve. Varying your options will make healthy snacking more sustainable.

Digestive aids

Sometimes in the afternoon, we may feel the effects of a heavy meal from the night before, or we may have eaten a lunch that doesn't sit well with us. It can be difficult to get through the afternoon with this feeling of discomfort and unease. Here are a few infusions that can help with digestion throughout the day. They are both preventative and curative. I suggest keeping a small jar of these by your desk and using them on different days (a small piece of ginger should last you 1–2 weeks if you're using a few thin slices a couple of times a week).

Mint leaves

Brew mint leaves in hot water for a few minutes, then cool down the water and drink. You could even brew the leaves in a mug of hot water and then add

this

concentrated mix of mint leaves and hot water to your large bottle of water (immersing the leaves in hot water will mean that the mint is more infused

and

concentrated).

Ground ginger or ginger juice I used to grate ginger and add to boiling water. Grating the ginger means the juices really seep into the water. If you're chopping the ginger, make sure the pieces are small so that the juices are released. However, I've now started taking ground ginger in hot water as this is a much more concentrated form of ginger. You can do either, though I'd say the powder is much easier. Buy a large pack of organic ground ginger and just keep by your desk and at home. This drink can be sipped through the day to reduce any cramps or discomfort from indigestion, but it has so many other benefits, such as warming the body from the inside, something that I certainly need as I'm always cold! Squeeze lemon or lime for additional flavour and to further aid digestion.

Fennel or cumin seeds Both of these seeds are great for digestion, stimulating and strengthening the digestive fire. I sometimes boil 1–2 litres of water with a teaspoon of both seeds for a few minutes, (although you can boil for longer), then let it cool down and fill my bottle to drink all day. You can place these seeds in a teabag so they're easier to remove. Or you can leave them in and chew on them later. I love chewing them! Additional options to this tea are coriander seeds and ajwain or carom seeds, both which also enhance digestion.

Ground cinnamon This is a warming and natural sweet spice that not only adds flavour to any food and drink, but also helps to relieve stomach cramps, reduce flatulence and help digestion. Simply stir cinnamon into hot water, with a spoon of honey if you like (ideally good-quality honey). Cinnamon also helps to lower blood sugar levels and is anti-inflammatory and therefore good for say muscle soreness or menstrual pain.

Peppermint essential oil

Buy a small bottle of peppermint essential oil and add one or two drops of this to whichever drink you like – or even just hot water. I love adding it to cocoa powder stirred into hot water and my matcha latte. Peppermint is great for bloated tummy and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and calms stress. IBS is

in fact

often caused by extra stress and therefore easing stress will ease the digestive

processes. Peppermint oil is also good for nausea and freshening the

breath. But it

is very concentrated, so you will only need one drop, perhaps two. You could of

course have peppermint tea leaves, but the essential oil is much more concentrated and therefore more effective.