

# Ask Mercedes



by Lorraine Mercedes Picot, RNCP, ROHP, nd

**Q: I'd love to know why I sometimes lose all of my energy after eating a meal. I can get really sleepy and it's so embarrassing especially when friends have treated me to a nice dinner. Shouldn't eating give me more energy?** *Natalie in Montréal*

**A:** Dear Natalie;

You're right in thinking that taking in nutritious food should have you revved-up and ready to go. Good quality nutrients activate metabolism and are critical to a fully functioning brain as well as to primed muscles. The conundrum expressed in your excellent question exposes the complexity of human metabolism and nutrition.

My first suspicion is that your drop in energy is related to a rapid lowering of your blood sugar levels. When this becomes chronic, the condition is referred to as Hypoglycemia. This reaction would be increased if most of the food you ate at a meal consists of what we call high glycemic carbohydrates. This is also worsened if your meal or snack contained little by way of protein. High glycemic carbs trigger an immediate release in insulin which rapidly lowers your blood sugar. Low blood sugar levels leave you feeling as wrung out as a dish rag.

Begin by seriously reducing or even eliminating poor quality carbohydrates such as white bread, pasta, white rice, sugar, sweet deserts, and soft drinks from your diet. Replace these foods with larger and more frequent servings of vegetables, occasional whole grains (especially quinoa), good quality proteins such as nuts, seeds and legumes. Quinoa is actually a seed although it's cooked and served like rice - and it's a delicious slow-burning carb with protein to boot. Don't skip meals or snacks and start your day off with a good protein food with your breakfast. Grabbing a bagel or muffin doesn't cut it.

My second area of interest would be whether or not you have food intolerances or sensitivities. Anyone who suffers with this issue will gladly report how "draining" it is energy-wise when they consume an offending food. In this case, your digestive system's failed attempts to break-down the molecules of certain foods saps more energy than these foods deliver. This process also triggers inflammation in the body by switching on your immune system. Food intolerances are possible even if you don't suffer from digestive problems which you haven't mentioned. Sometimes, extreme fatigue is the only symptom.

I suspect, like many young active people today, you may also be burning the candle at both ends. Be sure to get enough sleep as well as exercise and sunshine to maintain optimal functioning of your insulin delivery system. Alcohol may also be the culprit so go easy does it on wine and other alcoholic drinks.

Certain important supplements such as Chromium might be useful in managing your symptoms but work with a professional to determine the cause of your “crashes” before deciding which treatment to follow.

**Q: I’m a bit of a workaholic and too often stay up very late doing work on my computer. Lately, I’ve been packing on the pounds. I just read that there may be a connection. What gives? *Peter in Kingston***

**A:** Dear Peter;

Thanks for opening a fascinating can of worms. Assuming you’re not doing any serious late night noshing or guzzling down mochachinos to keep yourself awake, your increasing girth is mostly connected to blood sugar. Getting enough sleep at night isn’t only about shedding your daily woes and regulating stress levels although it does just that. As you suggest, new research shows that not getting enough Z’s can make us fat as well as cranky. Furthermore, and this is no snoozer, years of sleepless nights can predispose you to serious conditions such as diabetes and even heart disease.

Make sure your carbohydrates are only the slow-burning kind (low glycemic) and get adequate exercise and sunlight to help your pancreas manage your blood sugar.

But it’s really all about hormones! The hormone leptin, made by our fat cells, tells the brain when we’ve had enough to eat and a nasty little hormone called ghrelin, which is produced in our gut, stimulates appetite. Not getting enough shut-eye causes ghrelin levels to go up and leptin levels to go down. A Stanford University study actually confirmed that sleeping less than eight hours a night raises levels of ghrelin and lowers leptin. Love that leptin and gasp at ghrelin folks!

Getting some morning rays can also help with regulating the hormones melatonin and serotonin as well as providing you with Vitamin D. A deficiency in this critical vitamin also increases our risks of developing diabetes and can wreck havoc with weight.

As if that wasn’t enough to get all of us to hit the sack well before midnight, there’s yet another connection between lack of sleep and weight gain. People suffering from sleep deprivation (and stress in general) have higher than normal levels of another hormone called cortisol produced by our adrenal glands. You’ve guessed right! High cortisol is linked to abdominal fat.

We already know how to spell H-O-R-M-O-N-E-S. We already know they make the rocking world go round but here’s the proof that they also make your tummy go round... well you get the picture.

Yours in Health and Happiness,  
Mercedes



Send in your Nutrition and Wellness questions to: [andnowtoyou@gmail.com](mailto:andnowtoyou@gmail.com)

**Lorraine Mercedes Picot is a Registered Nutritional Consultant, Registered Orthomolecular Health Practitioner and Naturotherapist. Mercedes has been offering one-on-one nutritional counseling for over 20 years in Ottawa, in Victoria and she now resides in Montreal. She is passionate about her work and is committed to helping her clients reach their goals.**

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**The advice provided in her column is for informational purposes only. Please consult with a qualified Physician for any serious health problems.**