

Surviving the Mid-Afternoon Slump without Sugar

As a dietitian, one of the most common complaints I hear from clients is a lack of energy in the mid-afternoon accompanied by intense sugar cravings. They feel so worn down by 3 or 4pm, that all they can do is reach into the cabinet for an artificial sugar rush. While the sugar provides a quick burst of energy, it is followed shortly by a crash, leaving them feeling even more tired than before. This pattern repeats itself day after day, and clients often feel like they are stuck in an impossible cycle of “feel tired – eat sugar – crash – repeat.”

How can you break this cycle? It requires a holistic approach, examining both your diet and lifestyle choices that may be causing your fatigue. Here are the most common culprits that could be sapping your energy, and our best tips for conquering the mid afternoon slump *without* relying on sugar.

Common Culprit: Not getting enough sleep.

- Lack of sleep can cause you to crave high fat and high sugar foods for quick boosts of energy.

Solution: Aim for eight hours of sleep every night.

- There is no better investment in your health! We need sleep to restore and prepare ourselves for the day ahead, and lack of sleep can negatively affect your mood, concentration, appetite, and energy levels. Create a before-bed routine that starts at least 1 hour before you need to be asleep. Use this time to turn off all electronics, relax, and decompress before bed. Experiment to find pre-bed rituals that you love, like a warm bath, a cup of hot tea, a captivating novel, stretching, or a guided meditation. These rituals will help your brain settle down and prepare for sleep. Make a pack with a friend who is struggling with getting enough sleep. Report to each other – social accountability may help you be more accountable to your goals. Once you practice this new behavior consistently, you’ll find that you formed a new healthy habit of getting to sleep on time.

Common Culprit: Too much stress!

- Chronic high-levels of stress can disrupt your hormone levels, increase sugar cravings, and make it very difficult to lose weight (1).

Solution: Discover relaxation methods you love.

- If you tend to reach for sugar as a way to de-stress, it’s time to recognize your patterns and start inserting a new behavior instead. Some suggestions include belly breathing, journaling, walking, lifting weights, meditating, taking Epsom salt baths, stretching, reading, or talking with a friend or family member. When you can, try neck or foot reflexology. If you live in a metropolitan area, the charge will most likely be \$25 or less

per hour. Save up and splurge on this on occasion instead of going out for drinks or dessert.

Common Culprit: Eating too much sugar.

- Constantly stimulating your taste buds with sugar can give you a “sweet tooth.” The more you eat it, the more you want it!

Solution: Swap out high-sugar foods with whole food alternatives.

- When you taper off of sugar, it may be difficult first, but then your body will get used to the new eating habits, and you’ll feel great! Make it a goal to work towards the world health organization recommendation of no more than 6 teaspoons of added sugar a day.

Common Culprit: Artificial sweeteners.

- Yes, artificial sweeteners are calorie-free, but that doesn’t mean they are good for you. Preliminary research suggests that artificial sweeteners may cause you to crave more sugar throughout the day because they get your body used to consuming sweet tasting foods.

Solution: Go natural.

- Rather than craving sugar and giving yourself the fake stuff, indulge in a high-quality treat. For example, savor a square of extra dark chocolate rather than a whole bar of milk chocolate. If sugar-free sodas are your kryptonite, slowly swap them for unsweetened iced tea. You’ll still get a little caffeine, but rather than a slew artificial chemicals, you’ll enjoy heart health polyphenols and antioxidants from the tea.

Common Culprit: Meals lack balance.

Solution: See [Conquering Sugar Cravings Naturally](#)

Common Culprit: Your meals lack zest!

Solution: See [More Ways to Outsmart Sugar Cravings](#)

Discover the fatigue-causing culprits in *your* life and make the choice to change your behaviors. If you’re not sure where to start, try keeping a journal to find patterns between your lifestyle and energy levels. Pay attention to your diet, hours of sleep, stress-levels, and relaxation techniques. You’ll quickly see which activities sap you, and which ones energize you.

1. Macedo, Diez-Garcia. Sweet craving and ghrelin and leptin levels in women during stress. *Appetite* 80 (2014) 264-270