

Health & Healing

wellness solutions from a natural perspective



Green tea, ginkgo biloba, and ginseng (shown, from left) are useful fatigue zappers.

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boost from a bottle

A real-deal guide to top energy supplements.

YOU TOSSED AND TURNED last night, and this morning there's no time to eat breakfast. But you need a boost, so you zip over to your local Whole Foods market or health-food store where several shelves are dedicated to energy supplements. But can you really get energy in an easy-to-swallow capsule? What's in all those bottles, anyway? And do they work?

According to our panel of nutrition experts, energy supplements are no substitute for good lifestyle habits. Still, the supplements listed here can help—and certainly they're a more healthful solution than a six-pack from Starbucks.

By CAREY ROSSI
Photograph by MIKE LORRIG

Before you swallow anything, talk to your doctor to rule out physical causes for your fatigue—and to make sure the vitamin or herb you're considering won't interact with any other drugs you're taking, including over-the-counter medications like aspirin and Motrin.

Side effects can be more pronounced in people with health problems. "If you have a health condition, your body isn't working well as a cleansing tool, and taking supplements may exacerbate your condition," says Nicole Hilburt, R.D., of Temple University Hospital and Health System in Philadelphia.

With that in mind, consult the chart on page 101 to see which supplement could be right for you.

booster buyer beware!

Leave these three popular energy supplements on the shelf.

EPHEDRA

(aka ma huang) is a source of alkaloids like pseudoephedrine and ephedrine. It has been used as a nasal decongestant, an asthma treatment, a central nervous system stimulant, an appetite suppressant, and a metabolism booster to aid in weight reduction. Unfortunately, ephedra can have serious side effects. In 2004, the FDA banned products made from ephedrine alkaloids because they present an unreasonable risk of illness or injury.

BITTER ORANGE

(aka sour orange, Seville orange, citrus aurantium, and zhi shi) is touted as a safer alternative to ephedra, but a recent study at Mercer University in Atlanta suggests that it may be connected to adverse heart conditions.

KAVA KAVA

has been linked to liver toxicity and failure in Switzerland, Germany, and the United States. The University of Sydney in Australia recently examined all the theories related to kava's effect on liver toxicity and determined they were inconclusive, but stated that the potential risk cannot be ruled out.

8 options for more energy

| booster | how it works | cautions | forms | dosage |
|----------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Bee Pollen | This superfood contains practically every nutrient necessary to sustain life, says Ken Babal, C.N. | Test for allergic reactions by putting 2 or 3 granules under your tongue, says Babal. Those with bee allergies should be cautious. | Bee pollen can be eaten plain, or blended into drinks. It can also be found as a liquid extract and in pill form. | Take 1/2 tsp of bee pollen granules, says Babal. Or take 2 to 4 tablets a day of Cernilton, made from flower pollen extract. |
| Ginkgo Biloba | Ginkgo extract improves circulation, mental acuity, depression, and asthma, reports ConsumerLab.com, an independent testing company. | Spasms, cramps, and mild digestive problems can occur. Avoid ginkgo if you're taking aspirin or any other blood-thinning drug. | Look for extract, not leaves. Since fatty acids are needed for absorption, teas will not provide the same benefits, says Ed Bauman, Ph.D. | Bauman suggests up to 240 mg of a 50:1 extract, or 40 to 80 mg of powder extract. |
| Ginseng | "Ginseng builds stamina so your body can adapt to stress better," says Babal. It may also stimulate immune function. | Overuse, especially with caffeine, can result in sleeplessness, water retention, and high blood pressure. Interacts with blood thinners and anti-inflammatories. | Of the three types, Korean ginseng is overstimulating, says nutritionist Sally Kravich, who prefers Siberian ginseng or, for those with sensitive systems, American ginseng. | Extract: 100 to 200 mg per day. Root: 1 to 2 g a day. Tea: 3 to 4 times daily. |
| Gotu Kola | This leafy herb fights brain fatigue and strengthens blood vessels, which improves circulation, says Babal. | Headache, skin rash, and sunlight sensitivity may occur in rare cases. High doses can cause nausea. | Add fresh gotu kola to salads, or use the liquid extract in a 1:1 dilution; the freeze-dried herb is less potent. | Potency varies, so consult the label. Bauman usually suggests 1/2 tsp of diluted extract 3 times daily. |
| Green Tea | The caffeine in green tea stimulates the central nervous system. "Green tea is a better choice than coffee because it has antioxidants," says Kravich. | Large amounts can upset the stomach. Avoid caffeine if you have a weak heart, kidney disease, overactive thyroid, or anxiety disorder. | Decaffeinated forms tend not to have the same therapeutic profile, says Bauman. To get the benefits without the caffeine, use green tea extract. | Mix 1 tsp of leaves in 1 cup of hot water. Add licorice to sweeten and strengthen the flavor, or Siberian ginseng for an energizing combination, says Bauman. |
| Guarana | This Amazon vine contains xanthine derivatives like caffeine that work as short-term stimulants. | Be careful of caffeine overdose if you are also consuming coffee, tea, or chocolate. | Can be taken as a powder in water or juice. Available in sports and specialty drinks, such as SoBe. | Bauman recommends 200 mg a day of a standardized extract. |
| Spirulina | "A food to feed humanity," is how Bauman describes this single-cell algae. It is mostly vegetable protein and is packed with vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients. | May cause dizziness and a cleansing effect for novices at dosages greater than 1 tsp at a time, says Bauman. Build up dosage gradually. | Spirulina powder can be added to greens, seaweed, juices, applesauce, or yogurt, says Bauman. Tablets are also available. | For maintenance: 1/2 tsp to 1 tsp per day. When you need a boost: 1 tsp to 1 T daily. |
| Vitamin B | "Vitamin B in general helps extract energy from a healthy diet by metabolizing fats, proteins, and carbs," says Babal. Vitamin B ₁₂ helps the processing and absorption of iron, says Kravich. | The Office of Dietary Supplements suggests you use caution if you are taking drugs for GERD, peptic ulcer disease, or diabetes. | B vitamins can be taken orally as pills or liquids. They are also plentiful in fortified cereals, mollusks, beef liver, trout, and salmon. | Kravich suggests "a good B100 complex like Twinlab or Solgar." The RDA for B ₁₂ is 2.4 mg—a 1,000 mcg daily supplement "will help your energy levels, especially if you don't eat meat or eggs." |

our energy experts

Ken Babal, C.N., Los Angeles-based clinical nutritionist, author of *Good Digestion: Your Key to Vibrant Health*

Ed Bauman, Ph.D., director of holistic nutrition and culinary arts at Bauman College in Northern California, director of Partners in Health clinic in Pengrove, Calif.

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