

EATING FOR ENERGY

Tips and recipes for
interpreters



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TerpSummit 2021

Do you ever get a post-prandial dip in your energy levels that makes it hard to concentrate after lunch (hint: was it a big lunch? or lots of pasta?)? Maybe you run out of energy by the end of the day.

Many factors can affect your energy levels, including the quality and length of your sleep, and your stress levels.

In this short guide, I'll focus on nutrition, with some simple do's and don'ts. (though it's worth saying that there are interactions between stress and nutrition: for example, stress depletes levels of B vitamins in your body, which are essential for energy production from food).

Don'ts

Two big energy-sappers for you to avoid:

- **too much caffeine or alcohol.** Yes, caffeine can perk you up temporarily. But if you have too much (and the same goes for alcohol), it will affect your energy levels and your sleep.
- **simple sugars.** If you consume too much sugar, you're likely to have an energy spike followed by a dip. And that's to say nothing of the effects on health. So try to minimise your consumption of sweets, chocolate bars, cakes, biscuits, etc. There are many snack options that will keep your blood sugar levels steadier without the downsides of sugar, but that still feel like an indulgence (see my recipe guide for several high protein snack suggestions).

Do's

- **Have breakfast.** After a night of fasting, your body and brain are looking for some fuel! You can eat light if you don't fancy a big meal first thing. Make sure to include some slow release carbohydrates and protein to keep you going. Good options include porridge, toast with nut butter, or eggs on wholemeal toast.
- **Eat at regular intervals.** Leaving long gaps between meals make it more likely that you will reach for a coffee or the first snack that comes along (e.g. a pastry or chocolate bar - i.e. lots of sugar). Planning ahead so that you can eat regular small meals or snacks will help you keep your blood sugar level steady. For me, this means taking snacks to work so I can eat something in the booth mid-morning, or making sure I've prepared something healthy to eat as a snack at home.
- **Eat a varied diet.** This sounds like generic diet-related advice, but I'm mentioning it here in the context of energy levels for two reasons.
 - 1) B vitamins are essential for converting food into usable energy in your body, and B vitamins are found in lots of different foods, especially complex carbohydrates. So make sure you ring the changes and avoid having the same meals over and over again.
 - 2) Iron deficiency anaemia can make you feel tired; it's best to get iron from a variety of dietary sources, including green vegetables and breakfast cereal, for example. **One of the best ways to ensure you're eating a varied diet is to 'eat a rainbow'**, i.e. make sure the food on your plates is colourful.
- **Take a Vitamin D supplement in winter.** We normally think of Vitamin D as being essential to bone health, along with calcium - and it is. But a lot of recent research has shown that this vitamin has an important role in mood, and that low levels can lead to tiredness. The NHS's guidance in the UK is as follows: "You should take 10 micrograms (400 IU) of vitamin D a day between October and early March to keep your bones and muscles healthy."

Do's

- **Have protein with every meal and snack.** Protein is essential to the growth and repair of cells, and it also helps to keep your blood sugar levels steady. Another great benefit of protein is that it helps you feel full for longer. I'm sure you all know that protein is found in meat, fish, and eggs. Vegetarian sources include nuts, seeds, and pulses (lentils, beans). On the next pages, you'll find some ideas for high protein snacks.
- **Think about magnesium.** Magnesium helps to convert glucose into energy in your body. To get enough, make sure you're eating whole grains, or add a handful of nuts to a salad or breakfast cereal.

High protein snacks

Just to recap: eating protein with every meal and snack is a good idea, a) because it keeps your blood sugar levels steady, so you don't have a sudden dip, and b) because it keeps you feeling full for longer, so there is less risk of overeating because you suddenly feel starving.

What you consider a suitable snack is of course a very subjective thing! For some people, a snack is something that can be eaten on the go, or purchased outside the home. When I suggest something like a yoghurt, these people look askance.

Similarly, some people are quite happy to eat carrot sticks and a dip as a snack, or a boiled egg. For others, 'snacks' brings to mind either crisps/crackers or something sweet like muffins or chocolate.

In the list below, I've divided snacks into sweet and savoury. Some of them take a little preparation or effort (maximum 10 minutes); all but one or two are easily portable, and even those can be taken to work if you're OK with a small plastic container, or a small insulated mug

Savoury snacks

Hummus and carrot sticks

This is an easy snack to make from storecupboard ingredients.

Drain a tin of chickpeas (or for a change, kidney or haricot beans; you can even use peas). Blend with a tablespoon of tahini, a pinch of salt, the juice of a lemon, and a clove of garlic. Feel free to alter the proportions to taste. Put it in a small pot and take it to work with carrot and cucumber sticks, or cherry tomatoes.

There are endless variations: you could add roasted pepper or sundried tomatoes to your hummus, or all manner of spices (cumin is very good, or chilli pepper).

Savoury egg 'muffins'

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The proportions of this recipe are not set in stone. To make 6 'muffins' (I only call them this because they're made in a muffin tin; they're nothing like sweet muffins as they don't contain flour, and the texture is more like an omelette), I usually use 9 eggs.

In a large mixing bowl, mix the eggs, some chopped vegetables (red pepper, mushroom, and courgette are particularly good), herbs (e.g. thyme or basil), grated cheese (I use Cheddar), and chopped Quorn ham (for vegetarians - otherwise you could use bacon or ham). Divide between 6 holes of an oiled muffin pan.

Bake at 180C until puffed and golden - around 25-35 minutes.

Sweet snacks

Greek yoghurt

Greek yoghurt is extremely high in protein (around 10 g per 100 g of yoghurt), and if it's the 0% fat variety, low in fat and calories.

Serve a generous portion topped with mixed seeds or chopped nuts. Add a fruit if you like (e.g. chopped apple or orange).

If you like a little flavouring, you can try orange or rose flower water.

Peanut butter and oat cakes

Simply spread, or sandwich, oat cakes with peanut butter. You can make these savoury by using a scraping of Marmite, or keep the sweet theme with a tiny bit of jam.

Fruit and nuts

There are many variations on this theme.

One option is to spread apple slices with almond or peanut butter.

Another possibility is to make up some trail mix, with a variety of nuts and a few raisins or dried apricots. Some nuts are very expensive and not very environmentally friendly (I'm thinking of almonds from California). As I live in Europe, I tend to stick to hazelnuts, which don't generate so many food miles.

Protein shakes and smoothies

Honestly, I'm not a big fan of smoothies. I find it really hard to drink thick liquids, and although I love green vegetables of all types, adding spinach or kale to a smoothie really doesn't float my boat.

However, many people love them. Simply blend a little fruit (banana or apple, some berries), some green veg if you fancy it, a scoop of protein powder, and plant or dairy milk.

Personally, I'm just as happy, if not more, drinking a protein shake made of a scoop of plain whey protein powder, a tablespoon of cocoa, and a few drops of Stevia for sweetness. I find the flavoured protein powders (e.g. chocolate shake flavour) really quite revolting, hence the DIY approach.

Protein shakes can keep you feeling full for a long time, with a minimal intake of carbs and fats, and a significant contribution to your daily protein intake.

Sweet snacks

Energy balls

Years ago, I bought a small energy bar. The brand was Naked. I was curious about the ingredients, and having read them, realised I could very easily make my own energy balls or bars, for a fraction of the cost, and without all the packaging. Nowadays, of course, you can find whole recipe books of 'bliss balls'.

They're very simple to make. My favourite recipe is simply 50/50 nuts and pitted dates (maybe 200 grams each) + a handful of raisins + around 3 tablespoons of cocoa. Start with the nuts in a food mixer, blend them until they're in small pieces, add the dates and raisins, and mix until it forms crumbs or a paste. Add the cocoa. If you end up with a paste that you can pinch together, simply roll it into balls. If your mixture is a bit dry, you can add moisture and flavouring at the same time, for example with a tablespoon or two of coffee or some orange juice.

There are endless variations on energy balls. If you don't want to use cashews, which are expensive and exotic, you can try other nuts, such as almonds, hazelnuts or walnuts.

Good flavourings include coffee, orange zest or essence, almond essence, or spices (e.g. pumpkin spice).

You can swap the raisins for other dried fruit (sour cherries, apricots).

Feel free also to add some oats as a source of slow-release carbohydrate.

Best of all, energy balls keep for quite a long time in the fridge.

I hope you like some of these snack ideas!

Feel free to email me at info@theinterpretingcoach.com with comments and questions.