

seventeen

nutrition



Lisa's energy levels were so low that a two-block walk left her craving a nap—what was up with that?

why french fries put you to sleep

Does your eating style need a makeover? If you're anything like Lisa—and Lisa's like a lot of teenagers—it probably does. By Shari Sims

When Lisa Otoide, 19, arrived in New York City from southern California last summer to spend six weeks working as a **seventeen** intern, she was excited, eager, enthusiastic—everything but energetic. “I can’t walk two blocks without getting tired. Since I’m in good health and not over- or underweight, my bosses suspected my diet is doing me in. I’m a junk-food addict—I live on chips, soda and fries. My bosses offer to send me to a nutritionist to find out how to raise my energy level, and I jump at the chance. But I freak on my way to the first meeting: I’ll probably have to give up my favorite food—fries!” says Lisa.

START THE DAY RIGHT

“I started by asking Lisa to tell me exactly what she ate in the last 24 hours,” says Heather Greenbaum, a registered dietitian who calls her New York City practice Nu-Train (for nutrition training). “Lots of teens are like Lisa: They skip breakfast [‘Who has time?’] then snack all day [‘tons of potato chips’] and rarely eat anything resembling a meal till dinner,” says Greenbaum.

So her first bit of advice is no surprise: Eat breakfast. Your body needs fuel to last the day—and not just sugary baked goods like

doughnuts or toaster pastries. These mainly give you simple carbohydrates, which your body breaks down almost instantly. “Simple carbs like these give you a quick energy burst, but it’s short—your energy plummets just as fast,” explains Boston-based nutritionist Heidi Reichenberger, a registered dietitian and a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. “Foods that provide lasting energy take longer to digest, which means a mix of protein, fiber, some fat,” not just carbs.

Greenbaum’s breakfast suggestions?

- Low-fat cottage cheese or peanut butter—both contain protein and fat (and peanut butter’s fat is a healthy kind)—on a whole-wheat bagel (whole wheat, like other whole-grain breads and cereals, contains fiber).
- A whole-wheat pita with an egg or some cheese (again, protein and fat).
- Even cottage cheese and salsa (for snappy flavor) on whole-grain high-fiber crackers, like Wasa.

“I get up earlier so I can eat breakfast. I go for the cottage cheese, salsa and crackers. It sounds a little weird, but it’s good! I eat that every morning for four days, but by Friday, I’ve run out of cottage cheese. So instead I have a non-fat strawberry yogurt—it tastes good but

doesn’t fill me up. I keep a record of everything I eat for a week, then head back to Heather,” says Lisa.

A LITTLE VARIETY, PLEASE

One look at Lisa’s food diary revealed another problem to Heather: Lisa was eating the same thing over and over again, and not just at breakfast. One part of eating for energy is to give your body all the nutrients it needs, and that takes a wide variety of foods. “Heather had suggested that I incorporate some new foods into my diet, not just at breakfast but for snacks. She told me Luna energy bars [sold at health-food stores and elsewhere] are better snacks than potato chips—so I’ve been eating three or more a day! Even with breakfast, I’m often starving by lunch,” says Lisa.

Actually, Lisa *should* be hungry by lunch. Most of us need to eat something every three hours to stay energized, say both our experts. “One favorite snack of mine is homemade trail mix,” says Reichenberger. “Combine Cheerios or another high-fiber cereal with some nuts, sunflower seeds and a few chocolate chips or M&Ms; mix up enough to fill a sandwich-size plastic bag and tuck it into your backpack in the morning.”

PHOTO: JOSE CARVER

Fast Foods That Make Sense

These are fast foods you shouldn't skip. The trick is to have them right in front of you—on the counter, in the fridge, in your backpack. Make them as easy to grab as junky fast food and you'll not only eat them, you'll discover how much you like them!

▶ A peel-on-the-run banana, an apple, a bunch of seedless grapes—all are great fast snacks (thanks to their satisfying mix of carbs and fiber). Or grab a pre-made fruit salad at the market.

▶ Bags of mini carrots or other veggies are ideal munchies. At a salad bar, you can even make a "salad of sticks" as a finger-food snack: Look for peppers cut into strips, radishes, cucumbers, broccoli, whatever you like (as a rule, the more different colors, the greater the nutrient mix).

▶ Cups of yogurt with built-in spoons—modern packaging makes this healthy pick-me-up as handy as candy, and it's much better for your skin and body.

▶ Wrapped meals—even if you can't cook a lick, you can make these. Start with a whole-grain wrap. Add lean roast beef, turkey, egg salad, low-fat cheese, lettuce, tomato and anything else you like: sprouts, apple slices, raisins, nuts—be creative! Now you've got a walk-around meal. —S.S.

Even vending machines can provide healthy snacks. Go for packages of sunflower seeds, nuts or crackers filled with peanut butter. Just remember to mix it up. "I don't recommend having one thing all the time," says Reichenberger.

"Other good snacks are cheese and crackers, low-fat pudding or yogurt," she adds. "And try chocolate milk instead of soda. A lot of teens think dairy products like milk, cheese, yogurt and pudding are 'bad' because they're high in fat, but they all come in low-fat versions now. Besides, dairy products are loaded with calcium, which teens need to build bone strength throughout their teens and beyond," says Reichenberger. "Also, all good calcium sources are high in energy-sustaining protein." You can also get calcium from



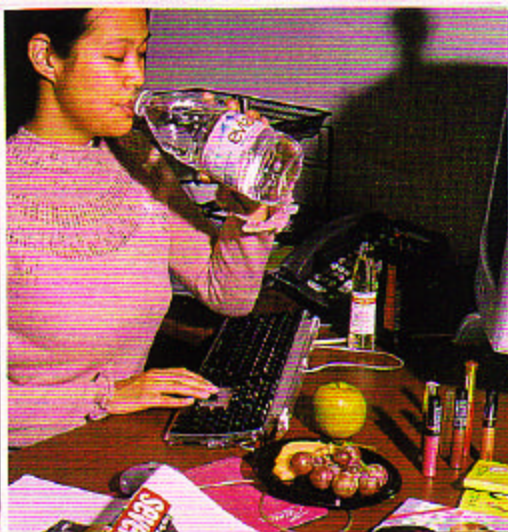
BEFORE AND AFTER Lisa was living on quick-energy foods like sweets and—her favorite—fries. But their short energy bursts bottomed out fast, leaving her exhausted. Switching to healthier snacks—fruit, whole-grain crackers—helped stabilize her energy.

fortified products such as certain juices and cereals. "Just be sure to have them with a protein snack," adds Reichenberger.

DINNER WITH PALS

"I've been managing lunch OK with things like tuna, lettuce and tomato on whole wheat. Heather says I can have basically anything I want as long as I include protein plus vegetables plus starch to give me enough energy to get me through the afternoon. Dinner is the hardest because I'm so hungry. And when I go out with my friends and watch them eat french fries—it's torture," says Lisa.

When dinner means going out or ordering in, there are lots of filling choices. Grilled chicken (skip the skin—it's mostly fat), salmon, lean roast beef, plus rice/pasta/potatoes (choose one) and vegetables (have several) are all tasty and satisfying. Just try not to think of foods as all good or all bad, says Greenbaum: "A few fries or a small dessert aren't going to ruin your diet or sap your energy; just don't overdo them, much less live on these foods." Quantity is important, too, she adds, "yet most restaurants



today serve such huge amounts that people don't have a clue about what a normal, healthy portion looks like. A serving of fish, meat or chicken should be about the size of a deck of cards; a serving of vegetables or starchy foods like pasta and rice should be roughly the size of your fist."

THE TEST

"In my last week in New York City, I went out with friends and couldn't pass up a burger, fries and root beer float. It was almost as if I were trying to test what Heather had been teaching me—and she was so right! I felt terrible afterward—so tired and droopy that I didn't want to move! In fact, I've noticed a big change in my energy levels overall. Now I can walk 20 blocks without noticing it instead of being exhausted after two. I don't feel like crashing at work right after lunch. I'm really proud of myself. When I got back to college, it was harder to stick to a regular eating schedule. But I'm doing really well, and eating breakfast every day—it makes a definite difference in how I feel," says Lisa. □

2 Energy Essentials You Won't Find in the Fridge

What you eat isn't all that contributes to how much oomph you have: Exercise and sleep are players, too. Getting the right amount of sleep and exercise is vital. "Regardless of how healthy your diet is, if you're getting four hours of sleep a night, you won't have any energy," says registered dietitian Heather Greenbaum. Teens need at least nine hours every night.

As for exercise, last fall the National Academy of Sciences suggested that everyone get a total of an hour of moderate physical activity daily. And that hour doesn't have to come all at once: Every bit of movement counts. Split it up any way you like and make sure to stay hydrated. You need eight cups of water a day, according to Greenbaum. —S.S.