

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Energy Boosters”

A good old cup of coffee is the go-to panacea for everyday low energy and fatigue. 54% of Americans over the age of 18 drink coffee every day. Americans average 3.1 cups a day and the average size of a cup is 9 oz. Coffee's caffeine jolt can temporarily boost alertness, perk up performance, and possibly even improve concentration. But caffeine is a drug, and as with any drug, there are right ways and wrong ways to use it. Caffeine can be worrisome for people with high blood pressure, diabetes, and osteoporosis. Plus, caffeine can interact poorly with some common medications, and it can worsen insomnia, anxiety, and heartburn. There are several disorders in which fatigue is pronounced, and they typically trace their pathology back to mitochondrial dysfunction. Vitamin D deficiency—which is common worldwide—is a principal cause of such fatigue and myopathy. In 1976, the American Egg Board created the slogan “The Incredible, Edible Egg.” This slogan became a pre-Internet meme of sorts, garnering what we would now refer to as viral status. Somewhere along the line, people developed a disdain for eggs due to concerns about cholesterol. However, studies on dietary lipids and CVD incidence have shown that dietary cholesterol is *not* an independent risk factor for heart disease. Today, eggs remain both incredible and, well, edible. Eggs provide a nutrient-dense source of energy from protein and fat, approximately 75 kcal per large egg, as well as several B vitamins, including thiamin, riboflavin, folate, B12, and B6, which are required to produce energy by the body. Experts have found that higher intake of omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs), which are found naturally in fatty fish, could decrease fatigue. In Western countries, many people have taken Asian ginseng for stress, improved health, and fatigue—and apparently with good reason. Results of a meta-analysis published in the *Journal of Korean Medical Science* found that Asian ginseng significantly reduced stress in several randomized control trials. Of note, the researchers included studies that tested Asian ginseng at dosages between 350 mg/day and 3,000 mg/day. The perennial flowering plant *Rhodiola rosea* is endemic to high, northern latitudes, and is thought to be an adaptogen—a group of herbs and mushrooms that boost the body's ability to cope with (i.e., adapt to) stress. *R. rosea* has also been assessed for potential performance-enhancing and therapeutic effects. A positive effect on physical performance was noted between 200 mg/day and 680 mg/day.

In the America that I love, keep drinking your coffee in moderation and enjoy. If low on energy, there are plenty of healthy alternatives. You'll likely find that there is only so much good that coffee can do. But you have choices.

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