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Women with Bottle
The Big Brands

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Jolanta Burke is a Positive Psychologist and PhD Researcher in Trinity College Dublin. She specialises in helping employees achieve high performance through developing resilience, managing character strengths and well-being.
A: Happiness is like a muscle. We need to keep using it for it to grow.

2. MOIRA CREEDON
After five years as Senior Finance Specialist at the Irish Management Institute, Moira launched Artemis Consultancy to offer financial advice and training to companies and organisations at both a national and international level. Moira holds an MBA from IESE Barcelona, focusing on business finance.
A: It's not about the cards you are dealt, it's how well you play your hand.

3. JILL KERBY
Jill Kerby writes personal finance columns for The Sunday Times and for a number of regional newspapers in her syndicated column, 'MoneyTimes'. The co-author of TAB Guide to Money Pensions and Tax and the TAB Guide to Property, she also edits Irish Pensions Magazine (IAPF).
A: Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain." – The Wizard of Oz
Positive Body: Boost Your Energy

Why am I so tired?
A few years ago I went through a spell of feeling tired all the time. I enjoyed my work and put a lot of effort into it. However, as soon as I left the office, I had no energy to do all the other things I loved. I couldn't understand what was happening to me. I wasn't depressed. In fact my life was going really well, yet I didn't feel well.
Being a positive psychologist I initially searched for the 'neck up' solutions, such as changing my thoughts to allow me think more positively; count my blessings for what I already had in my life; and boost my positive emotions by doing the things I enjoyed. They included having a bubble bath, making time to flick through my favourite magazine or spending time with my girlfriends. Yet no matter what I did, I felt de-energised.

This is when I decided to stretch my interests towards the studies of Positive Body, not only Positive Mind. In recent years, there has been an explosion of research around the effect of human touch, fashion, sexual behaviour, physical activity and nutrition on well-being. Changing my dietary and activity habits helped me improve my well-being.

Well-being and Food
A UK survey found that for women, what they eat is more important to their well-being than their sex life. We obsess about food, we eat either too little or too much, scuffle our food or take time with it. Food is important to us, but often we get caught up in habitual eating and forget what is actually good for us. The World Health Organisation 5-a-day campaign, encouraging us to eat more fruit and vegetables, is aimed to decrease obesity and improve our physical health, however, it does not mention mental health. The questions remain: what foods give us energy? What foods keep us happy? And what can we do to regain our energy and create positive bodies?

According to a recent study on the impact of consumption of fruit and vegetables on our mental health, we require not 5, but approximately 7 portions per day to keep our minds healthy. Yet only 27% of women and 25% of men eat more than 5 portions daily. The researchers analysed data from 80,000 people in the UK and found that those eating 7 and more portions a day had a significant increase in their life satisfaction, happiness, well-being, reduction in nervousness and mental disorders. At 5 portions a day, eating fruit and vegetable did not enhance well-being in comparison to those who ate 2 or 3 portions a day.

A lot of fruit and vegetables contain the amino acid tryptophan, which transforms into serotonin. Serotonin is a brain chemical that boosts energy levels, improves sleeping pattern, and decreases stress and even premenstrual symptoms. The foods particularly rich in tryptophan are: banana, avocado, spinach, garlic. Apart from fruit and vegetables, tryptophan can also be found in poultry, certain fish, seeds and egg whites.

Research shows that healthy food consumption is associated with higher education and age. The older we are, the healthier we eat. At the same time, data shows that women are the least happy around the age of 37, while men at 42. Could it have something to do with running busy households, working, looking after children and not having the time to keep our bodies happy with healthy food and long lasting high-energy fuel?

Glucose is our body's energy fuel. After carbohydrates are digested they break down into glucose which is carried along the blood stream and used by cells as energy. When our cells lack energy, it results in serious side effects. Some low-carb diets report unusually high levels of anger, tension, lack of energy and depression. A director of the Women's Health Programme at Massachusetts Institute of Technology found a connection between a low carb diet and low levels of serotonin, which keeps us highly energetic and happy. The connection appears so strong that scientists warned that antidepressants become less effective when accompanied by a low-carb diet.
There are two types of carbs, simple and complex. Simple carbs, such as sugary products, sweets or cakes, increase our glucose levels fast and let it drop just as fast inducing more tiredness. In order to keep our energy going with simple sugars, we need to consume large amounts frequently, which ultimately results in obesity and mood disturbance. An alternative to it is to eat a diet of complex carbohydrates, which includes fruit and vegetables, whole grains (brown products such as rice, pasta, bread), nuts and seeds (walnuts, brazil, pumpkin, sunflower) and dairy products (natural yoghurts, eggs). They release sugars slowly and keep our mind and body highly energised and positive for longer.

Glucose gives us the energy we need not only to do the things we love but also to boost our cognitive functions and improve self-discipline to exercise or change our diets. We use up glucose when refraining ourselves from doing or saying the things we want to, but can’t, for various reasons. For instance, when your co-worker annoys you with all her gossiping and you refrain yourself from telling her: Stop! you use up glucose. The more you hold yourself back, the more it is depleted. When you want to have that pastry with your morning coffee but refrain yourself from buying it, you also use up glucose. When too many such moments happen during the day, by the afternoon your glucose levels are further depleted which results in reduction of cognitive functions, such as lower performance and lack of concentration. Also when depleted, we tend to rely on simplistic strategies for making decisions, which are often inaccurate. For example, if a friend blanks us out, rather than consider she might not have seen us, or is not feeling well today, we might assume she did it on purpose. Depleted glucose also makes us spend money more impulsively, become more aggressive, drink more alcohol etc. Most importantly, however, reduced glucose levels makes us binge on foods that are not good for us, such as high-calorie, simple sugar chocolate bars which take us on a rollercoaster of high and low glucose levels.

From the psychological point of view, scientists devised a plan on what we can do to ensure we conserve glucose levels throughout the day, enough so that we have some energy left in the evening to play with our children, meet up with friends, exercise and do other things we enjoy. Our energy works like a muscle, the more we practice it in short spurts, the stronger it becomes and the more energy we are able to conserve. In order to exercise it we can do one of the following every day for a week: track the food you’ve eaten, improve your mood, improve your posture, follow a budget. When one of these activities is done every day for a week, we are more likely to have the energy to start exercising or changing our diets. Moreover, it has a spill-over effect on other aspects of our lives, such as reducing our caffeine intake, alcohol and cigarette consumption, we become more disciplined to keep up with our daily chores, we are more in control of our emotions and spend less.

Here are 3 steps to boosting our energy levels:
1. Eat 7 portions of fruit and veg daily
2. Eat a balanced diet to include complex carbs
3. Exercise your energy muscle

Don’t delay any longer, do something about your energy levels today. Your life is waiting!

Did you know?

There have been over 230 human trials on effects of chocolate on physical and mental health. They show that eating small amounts of dark chocolate (100g/day) improves our cognitive functioning, reduces the risk of disease and cancer and improve our longevity.

Drinking red wine (150ml/day) especially older wines from the south-east Mediterranean region helps decrease cardiovascular disease and improves our longevity.

Jolanta Burke is a Positive Psychologist and a PhD researcher in Trinity College Dublin. For more tips on how to enhance your happiness, go to www.jolantaburke.com