

[NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with Simple Again's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.]

Here's Why You're SO Tired Over the Holidays



Ever wonder why you're so inexplicably tired during what is supposed to be the most relaxing time of the year? Well, the holidays can certainly be exhausting. Running around, buying and wrapping gifts, planning parties, and traveling...whew...even thinking about it can be exhausting! Outside of physical exhaustion from running around, there are a bunch of things happening in the background that—without you even realizing it—can be contributing to your low energy levels.

Your energy levels greatly depend on the bacteria in your gut.

The gut microbiome is the ecosystem of trillions of bacteria and other microorganisms that live inside of our gastrointestinal tracts. These microbes have a wide variety of functions and capabilities, and one of the things we have seen them do is help regulate our metabolism. If we eat plenty of vegetables, fruits, and other fiber sources, we tend to have a more diverse and resilient gut microbiome. At the same time, we know that these foods are healthier for us because they help stabilize our insulin surges and metabolism. In fact, certain gut microbes have the potential to diminish insulin resistance and metabolic and cardiovascular disorders, but we have to cultivate that inner garden to allow that to happen.

On the flip side, certain foods (we're looking at you, simple carbs and sugars) can allow unfavorable bacteria to flourish and diminish our gut bacterial diversity. Not to mention, the energy high from the dopamine surge you get from these sugars and simple carbohydrates will only get you so far. Once your body figures out what to do with all that sugar and packages it away inside your cells, you will be looking for a way to keep that energy "high" up, and you may start to crave other things that give you the same feeling quickly because you will get cranky and tired otherwise. This is where the vicious cycle begins and where the gut microbiome gets thrown off kilter.

Caffeine, alcohol, and portion control are also major players in your holiday fatigue.

Some of us may turn to caffeine sources to keep the energy levels higher. We know that coffee, for example, has a stimulating effect and also has a number of health benefits in the proper context.

However, one study suggested that it may also contribute to insulin resistance in the setting of a high-fat diet. So, you can see how a variety of things can have an additive effect on your health and gut microbiome and thus your energy levels.

During the holiday season, cocktails are usually also freely flowing. Excessive alcohol intake can be a poison to the gut microbiome and can affect our metabolism as well. We all know that sleep quality is not the same when alcohol is part of the equation. What we don't always appreciate is that our circadian clock influences our metabolism and that the gut microbiome is involved in that process as well. When we throw one element off, the others can go along with it as well.

Additionally, while those delicious and heavy holiday meals seem attractive, overeating and overindulging can translate to higher fatigue levels as well because it is felt that insulin resistance can alter tryptophan metabolism and contribute to mood alterations and fatigue in certain populations. This could mean that when you have big surges of insulin in response to the heavy meals, it might feel good at first, but your metabolism and gut microbiome are really not happy, and that feeling of fatigue and sleepiness you have after eating is just a sign of just that.

So, while we all want to enjoy the holidays and have a good time with family and friends, we also should keep in mind that if we are full of energy and excitement, we are likely to have more fun than if we are sleepy and tired all the time! Protecting our gut microbiomes by eating healthy foods as much as possible, watching portion sizes, and not overindulging in alcohol, caffeine, and other sweet treats can protect our metabolism and give us increased energy levels so we can enjoy our holidays on a much bigger level.

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