



Trying to avoid eating late at night? Better to eat late than miss a meal altogether, says Collins. 'If you're an active person, skipping a late meal when you need it is one of the worst things you can do when it comes to your energy plan. Recovery and muscle protein synthesis continues overnight while you sleep. If you've had an active evening, going to sleep without eating will leave your muscles in negative equity. If you're worried about eating too close to bedtime, leaving an hour after food will be adequate.'

Are you underfuelling?

Want to get more from your workouts?
It's time to flip your diet on its head

Do you struggle through your workouts or feel you're not seeing results? If your usual day's diet looks something like this – cereal or toast for breakfast, salad or soup for lunch, main meal for dinner – you could be underfuelling, says performance nutritionist James Collins. Like a car, your body needs fuel in the engine to perform at its best, but the typical working-day diet often just doesn't provide the energy and nutrients your body needs to do the mileage.

'I encourage the athletes I work with to fuel for the physical demands of their day,' says Collins, author of new book *The Energy Plan – Eat Smart, Feel Strong, Perform at Your Peak* (Vermilion, £12.99). 'This means increasing energy intake – in the form of lower-GI carbohydrates – earlier in the day for morning or afternoon training.

Unless they're competing in the evening, dinner is generally lower in fuel.'

But in the working world, Collins notices this pattern is usually the reverse.

'Fuelling is more typically based on habit and generally involves a light breakfast, a sandwich for lunch, no mid-afternoon snack and then being so hungry by dinner that anything put

in front of us – usually the biggest meal of our day – will be wolfed down.'

Sound familiar?

This is back-to-front logic, says Collins. 'From a performance perspective, this [pattern of eating] often means a lack of energy during the working day (and while training), meaning you're not operating at full capacity, and then you're consuming

more energy in the evening, when you're less active.' Not only can this hamper performance in the gym, it also encourages poor food choices, impacting on your

'MAKE BREAKFAST AND LUNCH YOUR BIGGEST MEALS OF THE DAY'

metabolism and weight management, says Collins.

'This daily structure also means you aren't getting the best maintenance,' he

adds. 'Insufficient protein intake at breakfast is common, even among elite athletes. This means that both your energy levels and muscle repair take a hit during the day. It's bad news all round.'

Switch your meals

The solution to all-day energy? Just flip your current pattern of eating, says Collins.

'Start by reducing the carbohydrate at dinner,' he advises. 'This will be key to creating an appetite in the morning. Then front-load your daily energy intake: aim for breakfast and lunch to be the biggest meals of the day.'

Collins encourages his clients to evaluate how they feel after making these changes every week, using a self-monitoring questionnaire. Rate the following criteria on a scale of one to five – your energy, mood, sleep, muscle soreness and stress levels. 'Be aware that changes won't happen overnight,' he says. 'Give your body three to four weeks to adapt to this new pattern.'

Scrap the snacks

Next, it's time to address what you eat during your working day. Do you tend to eat the same things every day – breakfast on the go, sandwiches at lunch, takeaway on Friday night? Big mistake says Collins. 'Many people have well-worn habits, but variety is vital for ensuring we have the full range of micronutrients in our diets, crucial for the repair of our tissues.' Change things up, eating different types of protein, pulses, grains, fruits and vegetables every day to increase your dietary variety.

Next, look at your snacking habits. Do you rely on snacks to fuel you through the day between meals, or skip meals and snack instead? This can disrupt your blood-glucose levels leading to energy dips that sabotage work performance as well as gym results.

'It also means you don't feel like eating a performance plate full of the right fuel when mealtimes come,' adds Collins. Ditch the snacks and start eating just three meals a day with the relevant portions and fuels for your needs. Track your wellness measures again weekly and keep a note of how your appetite changes. 'The drive to eat a full meal will now be there, and your energy levels will become more consistent,' says Collins. 'Overall, you should become more productive at work and at home.' ■

The Energy Plan by James Collins (Vermilion, £12.99) is out now.