

Build some *bounce* into your life

Worried about your health and fitness levels? Sports nutritionist **James Collins** has some no-nonsense advice to keep us strong and energetic as we age

He was Arsenal FC's first performance nutritionist. He works with Olympians and other elite athletes at the top of their game. But James Collins's new book, *The Energy Plan*, is every bit as much for you and me as for the sporty young. 'Even though the chapter on ageing is at the end of the book,' says James, 'it's the area that I think is the most important. It's something I feel really passionate about. A lot of people become more sedentary with age, but you don't have to accept that ageing is inevitable – you can fight it.'

And fight it we really must. The statistics for muscle loss with the passing years make sobering reading (see below). You begin to understand how a short flight of stairs can come to seem as daunting as Everest, yet it doesn't have to be that way.

The Energy Plan is packed with information on diet and exercise, on warding off illness and enjoying better sleep, but the bottom line is this: we can lose our muscles, or we can use them. In particular, we can benefit from working with weights. That might mean joining a gym, or working out at home, but it also means building good practice into daily life. 'Our environment encourages

us to be lazy, from ordering food to driving to the gym. We need to look at adding muscle stress into our days, for example by walking to the shops and carrying the bags back instead of shopping online.'

And, as we use our muscles more, so we must feed them. 'It's never too late to make changes to your diet and nutrition. There is some amazing research going on at the moment looking at the amount of protein people need in older age, and we know that the older age group doesn't eat enough of it. You have to feed the muscles protein regularly, because they're constantly breaking down and rebuilding.'

'The two key points are to stress the muscles more and to give them the fuel, the protein, to grow and maintain them. It doesn't have to be a revolution. It might be just adding low-fat Greek yogurt to tea and toast at breakfast, which is the meal that people struggle with. And the other thing we're going to see over the next few years,' James predicts, 'is more acceptance of the use of protein shakes as a good way to get a dose of protein.'

Here, then, is James's easy-to-follow six-point energy plan to help us hold back the years.



Energy express – your anti-ageing plan

1 Rev the engine each day
Exercise is a crucial tool in fighting age-related decline in cells within our organs and tissues. Aerobic exercise, such as jogging, cycling or swimming, improves heart function and works to keep the brain from conditions involving cognitive decline, such as dementia. Any type of exercise also increases metabolism. On days when you don't have time for a fitness class or a run, just increasing your step count (for example, with a brisk 30-minute walk) can make a big difference to reducing body fat.

2 Don't resist resistance
Sarcopenia, the loss of muscle mass and function, can have a marked impact on quality of life. By the age of 40 it can decline by 0.8% a year, and this becomes more noticeable with the passing years. In the same way as weight gain can creep up on you, you might start to find yourself not

quite hitting the heights on the golf course that you once did, or struggling towards the end of your run. And later in life sarcopenia can have serious repercussions, reducing mobility and the ability to perform daily activities such as climbing the stairs. It also increases progression towards frailty, falls and metabolic disease.

Resistance training (strength training or weights) is the first step to get the ageing effects of our muscles under control. The current UK guidelines are for two sessions a week, and these should activate the six major muscle groups: legs, abdominals, back, chest, shoulders and arms. These exercises can easily be completed at home, or through a class at a gym or leisure centre.

3 Prioritise protein
But training on its own isn't enough; we need fuel to fight the ageing process too, in the form of maintenance foods – proteins. When proteins are digested, they are broken down into amino acids, which are transported in the blood and taken up by the muscle to be used to repair and build new muscle tissue.

Your muscles are constantly undergoing a cycle of growth and repair, so your daily intake needs to meet this demand. The current recommended daily allowance (RDA) of protein for sedentary people is 0.8g per kilo of body weight; however, recent reviews suggest this is way too low for the ageing and elderly population, with the recommendation being a minimum of 1.2g per kilo of bodyweight. For someone weighing 70kg (11 stone), that's a minimum of 80g per day, or a 20g helping – perhaps a large serving of low-fat Greek yogurt or a small chicken breast – four times a day. Yet 25% of older men and 50% of older women fall short of the RDA.

Proteins containing a complete range of amino acids are the most beneficial. This means foods such as dairy, poultry and fish, quinoa and buckwheat. Other plant sources such as rice and beans are good sources when combined to make them complete.

In general it is good to include more fresh fish, especially oily fish containing omega 3 fatty acids, such as fresh salmon and tuna, mackerel, sardines, trout and herring. Studies suggest that these also reduce

inflammation and potentially lower the risk of heart disease, cancer and arthritis. Replacing red meat, especially processed meats such as bacon and sausages, is also recommended owing to the increased risk of bowel cancer linked to these.

4 Curb the carbs
As you age, it is doubly important for you to marry your intake of carbohydrates, particularly the simple sugars, to your activity levels. For high-activity days you'll need carbs, but for days spent at your desk or relaxing, you won't need them as much. Often the easiest way is to reduce carbs at dinner: just increase your portion of protein – and cut out the snacking between meals.

5 Up the protection
As we enter later life, the pay-off for eating more fruit and vegetables becomes clearer. Increased intake of these is linked to a reduction in such conditions as heart disease, diabetes and cancer. A public health study by University College London looked at the eating habits of 65,226 people and found a significant relationship between eating fruit and vegetables and death at any age. Eating five to seven portions a day reduced the risk of death by 36%, and for those hitting more than seven portions, risk of death was reduced by 42%.

6 Pace yourself
Bring in changes around training and nutrition over time. For instance, it is natural to take a while to build resistance training into your routine – it's a big step.



Adapted from
The Energy Plan
by James Collins
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