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If you're like most people, you eat three meals a day -- [breakfast](#), lunch and dinner -- and maybe a few [snacks](#) in between. Doing so can help prevent hunger and keep your metabolism running consistently during your waking hours, notes [Nicole M. Avena](#), Ph.D., assistant professor of neuroscience at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, visiting professor of health psychology at Princeton University and author of [What to Eat When You Want to Get Pregnant](#) (Citadel, 2021).

"Lunch, specifically, plays an important role in re-energizing the body during the middle of the day when concentration and blood sugar levels are getting low," she says. "Lunch keeps your metabolism going and gives you energy to carry out with the rest of your day."

Sometimes, however, even after you've eaten lunch, you experience what's known as the midafternoon crash -- a stark dip in energy levels an hour or two after your middle-of-the-day meal. This crash most commonly occurs between the hours of 3 and 4 p.m., according to [Laura Cipullo](#), RD, founder of Laura Cipullo Whole Nutrition + Yoga in New York City and New Jersey, and is usually the result of your circadian rhythm signaling your body to decrease cortisol production, which causes a lull in alertness. "If you have not eaten, you will experience a huge crash from falling cortisol and falling blood sugar," she says. This crash tends to be symptomatic of fatigue, a boost in hunger and often irritability, she notes.

The good news is that you can prevent this midafternoon slump from happening in the first place while keeping your energy and attitude up. Here is a look at what factors might be causing your midafternoon crash -- and how to remedy each situation.

### **1. Your beverage of choice is coffee.**

Coffee can be a helpful beverage, especially in the morning, because it boosts your energy and productivity levels, giving you the gusto to get more done, Cipullo explains. However, she warns against consuming it around lunchtime, especially if it's not your first jolt of java that day. "By the time 3 p.m. hits, your nerves are shot, you are over-caffeinated and feel jittery from the sugar-caffeine combo," she says. What's more: Coffee is a diuretic, so it dehydrates you, which can lead to fatigue, headache, aching muscles and irritability, to name a few, Cipullo notes. "Not only will water counteract caffeine's diuretic effect, but hydrating will help lower blood sugar," she says.

## **2. Your lunch is fat-free.**

While many people worry that eating fats will cause them to gain weight, they're missing an important bit of knowledge: Fat plays an integral role in our metabolism and energy production. "Fats help give your body a source of energy, ensuring you have the fuel to finish your day," Avena says. "Adding [healthy fats](#), like avocados, seeds, nuts and cheese, to a lunch meal could help incorporate more healthy fats into your diet -- and keep you energized throughout the day."

## **3. Your lunch is short on protein.**

Protein is one of three macronutrients that are essential for overall health and wellness. But [protein](#), especially, comes in handy to keep your blood sugar in balance, diminishing the fluctuations that occur when sugar is consumed, Avena explains. "When refined carbs, like white bread, white rice or pasta, are prioritized over protein, the imbalance of blood sugar is more drastic, leading to the afternoon crash," she says.

To diminish these effects, she suggests trying an animal- or [plant-based](#) meat in addition to fresh vegetables. "While this may not be the easiest thing to prepare in the morning, taking time to prepare meals will be more beneficial when the time in the day is not lost to a surge in drowsiness," she says.

## **4. You're overdoing it on carbs.**

If you're guilty of enjoying a bagel for lunch or a sandwich on a big hearty loaf of bread, you may be overdoing it on your carb intake, which could be causing your midafternoon slump. After you eat a high-carb meal or snack, you might feel an initial jolt in energy, but you are also likely to experience a drop shortly after as a result of the sugar crash this nutrient causes. Cipullo suggests instead opting for [complex carbohydrates](#), lean proteins, plant fats, such as a black bean shrimp and avocado bowl or chicken salad made with

cauliflower, apples, celery and olive oil. "This will be slowly digested and thus slowly released into your bloodstream over three to four hours, very similar to an extended-release medication, to get through the 3 or 4 o'clock crash," she says.

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