

REMEDIES

Clearing the Mental Fog

A DOUBLE ESPRESSO CAN add spring to your step when you're short on sleep, but a compound called NADH may do more to sharpen your mind. NADH, which is sold over the counter under the trade names ENADA and ENADAlert, is not a stimulant and has no apparent side effects. It's a "co-enzyme" that, when produced naturally within the body, helps cells function more efficiently. Past studies have found that NADH supplements can help ease symptoms of jet lag and chronic fatigue syndrome. Now researchers are reporting that these same supplements can improve mental performance in people suffering from run-of-the-mill short-term sleep deprivation.

The new findings come from New York Presbyterian Hospital-Weill Medical College, where scientists enlisted 25 healthy, middle-aged volunteers to pull all-nighters in a sleep lab. After staying up for 24 hours, each volunteer received either placebo or 20mg of NADH in sublingual (under-the-tongue) tablets. The pills had no effect on how tired people felt, but those taking the actual supplement gained an edge on cognitive tests. When asked to distinguish among patterns on a screen or to solve simple math problems, the subjects who got NADH performed more efficiently – generating more correct responses per minute – than those who got the placebo. On some exercises, several of the participants taking NADH performed better than they had in a normal, rested state.

Results from a 25-person trial are no cause for a run on this stuff, but the new findings suggest there is hope for us all. Nearly a third of U.S. adults manage less than seven hours' sleep each night, according to the National Sleep Foundation, and some 69 percent complain of frequent sleep problems, Delis and vitamin stores peddle countless remedies for fatigue, but few have undergone rigorous testing. If NADH works as well as the early results suggest, it could someday rival coffee as the foundation of a good breakfast.

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