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REVERSE
DIABETES



A HEALTH-CONSCIOUS
HOLIDAY RECIPES
**GRACEFUL
TABLE**





THE INSIDE SCOOP ON DIABETES

SWEET SCIENCE

Our bodies evolved by developing sophisticated mechanisms that help us adapt to changes in diet, lifestyle, and environment. But what happens when too many negative influences affect our health all at once—unhealthy foods, an overload of environmental toxins, sedentary lifestyle—and we can't adapt well enough? Our complex biological mechanisms start to misfire, and we have trouble maintaining the balance needed for optimal health. As a result, a number of chronic illnesses can develop. Diabetes is a classic example.

DIABETES: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

In both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes, the main problem is the body's response to food.

When we eat, beta cells in the pancreas detect glucose (blood sugar) and release insulin, which tells other cells to ingest the glucose. This provides energy for cells and keeps circulating blood sugar at healthy levels. An overabundance of sugar in the blood stream damages blood vessels and wreaks havoc on organs and tissues, potentially leading to eye problems, kidney failure, cardiovascular disease, nerve damage, and many other conditions.

People develop diabetes when their bodies lose the ability to properly handle blood sugar. In Type 1 diabetes, an autoimmune response destroys pancreatic beta cells, and we don't entirely understand why. Insulin is no longer released, cells don't get the message to take in glucose, and blood sugar accumulates to toxic levels. Until injectable insulin was developed, Type 1 diabetes was generally fatal.

Type 2 diabetes is a bit more complicated. Cells gradually lose their ability to respond to insulin, causing toxic levels of glucose to accumulate in the bloodstream. This gradual loss could be caused by age, obesity, or other issues such as over-consumption of high-sugar foods over time. As blood sugar accumulates, pancreatic cells have to work harder to produce more insulin. The condition

gradually escalates: Cells become more insulin-resistant; glucose accumulates in the blood stream, and the pancreas compensates by producing more insulin. Eventually, pancreatic beta cells burn out and the condition can become more like Type 1 diabetes, in which no insulin is produced at all.

METABOLIC SYNDROME

So far, there's not much that can be done to prevent Type 1 diabetes; however, Type 2 diabetes is a different story. The disease takes a long time to develop and is often preceded by metabolic syndrome, a condition that comes with a laundry list of symptoms:

- Excess belly fat
- Too much bad cholesterol (LDL) and triglycerides and too little good cholesterol (HDL)
- Inflammation
- High blood pressure
- Excessive blood clotting and poor circulation
- Initial insulin resistance
- Elevated fasting blood glucose

If many of these warning signs look familiar, it's because they are also associated with cardiovascular disease—metabolic syndrome's close relative. However, these conditions *are* controllable and even reversible with a healthy diet, supplementation, and lifestyle changes. ▶

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DIET AND EXERCISE

Perhaps the greatest contributor to metabolic syndrome and ultimately Type 2 diabetes is weight. Multiple studies have made the correlation between excess weight and poor sugar metabolism.

If you're carrying too many pounds, do everything you can, within healthy guidelines, to take them off. In this case, the age-old approach may be the best: Increase activity and emphasize a healthy diet.

Being mindful of your food intake goes beyond counting calories. For people with concerns about diabetes, metabolic syndrome, or weight, it's critical to emphasize low-sugar foods that are low on the glycemic index. This index measures the amount of time specific foods take to break down into glucose. The faster they're metabolized, the quicker blood sugar ticks up—something you want to avoid. Find foods that are low on the glycemic index scale and won't cause blood sugar to spike and crash. Good choices include high-fiber vegetables, whole grains and legumes, and many nuts. Avoid sugary cereals, high-sugar fruits, white enriched pastas or bread, and white potatoes, to name a few.

Many studies support this approach. When people eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly, they cut their risk of diabetes in half. In my view, this is the smartest approach, as it requires no medication. And it's important to recognize that exercise doesn't mean running a marathon. Simply walking 30 minutes a day has been shown to provide remarkable improvements in metabolic, cardiovascular, and overall health.

THE ROLE OF STRESS

Even with a healthy diet and regular exercise, however, our relationship with insulin is still complicated. While excess weight can lead to insulin resistance, so can mental and emotional stress, as well as environmental toxins and other factors that increase oxidative stress in the body. Studies have shown that elevated stress can lead to spikes in insulin production, which can also cause insulin resistance.

In addition, stress elevates cortisol levels, which in turn elevate blood sugar.

Embrace methods to fight stress. Exercise, yoga, t'ai chi, and meditation are all effective. Find the mode that works best for you and practice diligently.

THE BOTANICAL APPROACH

Traditional Asian medicine is an abundant source of powerful herbal remedies that can help address diabetes and metabolic syndrome from many angles. Try one or more of these:

- **Gymnema leaf** is believed to improve insulin release and glucose uptake and support beta cell growth. In controlled studies, patients with both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes have responded to gymnema leaf extract.

- **Fenugreek seeds** are rich in fiber and protein and naturally control glucose levels. This botanical slows digestion and carbohydrate absorption, leveling off insulin production. Studies have shown that patients given fenugreek seeds have improved blood sugar control and lower triglycerides.

- **Natural metabolic formula:** In my clinical practice, I recommend a comprehensive natural metabolic formula to address diabetes and metabolic syndrome. This formula incorporates a number of clinically proven ingredients to support beta cell function, glucose balance, insulin sensitivity, and circulation, and offers other important benefits related to glucose metabolism in the body.

- **Holy basil** is believed to enhance beta cell function and has shown positive results for patients with Type 2 diabetes.

As always, I recommend a balanced approach incorporating diet, lifestyle, and natural supplements. Metabolic syndrome and Type 2 diabetes are treatable conditions, and by addressing them with natural solutions, you can benefit numerous other areas of health in the process. **TFL**

Isaac Eliaz, MD, LAc, is medical director of the integrative health center Amitabha Medical Clinic in California.