

Managing Diabetes Naturally

When we eat, our bodies break down the proteins, carbohydrates and fats we consume to be used as the building blocks of our bodies.

Carbohydrates, such as those found in bread, pasta, rice, potatoes and cereals are first digested and converted into simple sugars in the intestines and then move from the intestines into the bloodstream. These simple sugars are our body's first choice for energy production.

Glucose, a form of simple sugar is the basic fuel the body uses for energy. In order for our bodies to utilize this sugar however, it must be transported across the cell membrane where it can be used to feed and fuel our cells. Insulin, a hormone secreted by the pancreas, and more specifically by the islets of Langerhans, which are scattered throughout the pancreas, stimulates our body's cells to absorb sugar, thus removing it from the blood stream.

When our bodies cannot properly utilize glucose, thus causing it to stay in the blood, we are diagnosed as having diabetes. Diabetes is a disorder which disrupts the mechanism by which the body controls blood sugar. The build-up of sugar in the blood, characterized by diabetes, can cause the cells of our bodies to be starved for glucose and can, if left unchecked, lead to damage of the eyes, kidneys, nerves and heart.

There are two types of diabetes: insulin dependent or Type 1 diabetes and non-insulin dependent or Type 2 diabetes. Type 1 diabetes, is often referred to as juvenile or childhood-onset diabetes. Here, the pancreas cannot make the insulin needed by the body to process glucose. For individuals with Type 1 diabetes, while natural therapies may help the body be more receptive to insulin, they require regular injections of insulin to maintain health.

On the other hand, individuals with Type 2 or Adult-onset diabetes, their bodies produce varying amounts of insulin, but more often than not, the ability of their body's cells to absorb sugar is diminished. While there are "classic" warning signs that often accompany diabetes, i.e., excessive thirst, excessive hunger, excessive urination, excessive tiredness, and unexplained weight loss, many people with type 2 diabetes do not have these symptoms. Individuals who are at a greater risk include people who are: over age 40, are overweight, have a family history of diabetes, have had diabetes during pregnancy, have high blood pressure or high blood fats, have the stress of an illness or injury, are a member of a high-risk ethnic group such as African-American, Hispanic, American Indian and Asian. For these individuals, natural therapies tend to work well.

Recommendations For Wellness

Reduce your consumption of starchy foods that are high in carbohydrates such as bread, potatoes, processed cereals, rice or that have a high glycemic index rating. The Glycemic Index is a system that ranks foods based on how they affect your levels of blood sugar.

Consume a high fiber, whole foods diet and work to eliminate preprocessed junk foods from your eating regimen.

Start an exercise program! In most cases, weight reduction can help those with type 2 diabetes. In addition to decreasing body fat, regular exercise has been shown to improve insulin sensitivity.

Dietary fiber, such as psyllium has been shown to improve glucose tolerance in some studies.

Incorporate brewer's yeast or a chromium supplement into your health program. Chromium helps improve glucose tolerance by increasing our body's sensitivity to insulin.

Supplement with vitamins and minerals such as vitamin B, Vitamin C, vitamin E, magnesium and zinc. Individuals with diabetes tend to have low levels of these important nutrients in their blood. In addition, these supplements have been shown to help to reduce damage to the eyes, nerves and kidneys - health problems that are often experienced by people with advanced or long term diabetes.

Alpha Lipoic Acid has also been shown to improve insulin sensitivity.

Evidence suggests that supplementation with vitamin D can increase insulin levels in some people.

The herb Nopal can help to strengthen the liver and the pancreas thereby improving our body's ability to utilize insulin.

Some sources recommend that you avoid the amino acid cysteine which has been reported to break down insulin and interfere with sugar absorption.

Stevia, a naturally sweet plant makes an excellent sugar substitute without the drawbacks of sugar. Stevia can be used in cooking as well. Visit your local health food store or look online for cookbooks that utilize stevia in place of sugar.

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