SPOTLIGHT ON diabetes
SET A GOAL TO TAKE CONTROL

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Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in Canada and affects approximately 5 percent of the population. According to Statistics Canada, rates are significantly higher in the eastern provinces.
The good news is that many cases of diabetes can be prevented with healthy diet and lifestyle practices. Those with diabetes can greatly benefit from the implementation of holistic medicine that also includes targeted nutritional supplements.

**MORE THAN ONE DISEASE**

**Type 2 diabetes** In this, the most common type of diabetes, the pancreas does not produce enough insulin, or the body does not properly use the insulin it makes.

Most often diagnosed in adulthood, type 2 diabetes is being diagnosed in increasing numbers in children.

**Type 1 diabetes** This is a disease in which the pancreas does not produce insulin and which requires daily insulin injections to maintain blood glucose regulation. It is most commonly diagnosed before the age of 30.

**Gestational diabetes** As with other forms of diabetes, this condition is defined as glucose intolerance, but with its first onset during pregnancy. Blood glucose levels usually return to normal following delivery.

**Pre-diabetes** is a condition that occurs when a person's blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not at a level found with type 2 diabetes. This may affect up to 6 million Canadians.

**DIABETIC-FRIENDLY DIET**

To better regulate blood sugar levels, one must incorporate a diet that stabilizes blood sugar fluctuations.

**Fibre** Consume a diet high in fibre, including vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, and whole grains. Particularly important is water-soluble fibre, which slows the absorption of glucose from meals into the bloodstream. Examples include oat bran, seeds, beans, and apple skins.

Another helpful food that reduces glucose spikes after meals is ground flaxseeds. Take 1 to 2 teaspoons (5 to 10 mL) with each meal or 1/4 cup (60 mL) daily. Make sure to drink plenty of water when you start taking flaxseeds: 3 1/2 ounces (100 mL) of water to each teaspoon (5 mL) of flaxseed.

In addition, people with diabetes produce much higher levels of free radicals. These negatively charged molecules damage cells and speed up the aging process. A diet rich in plant foods containing phytonutrients and antioxidants helps to counteract these free radicals.

A daily total of 50 mg of fibre daily is a great goal, with a daily total of seven servings of fresh fruits and vegetables.

**Protein** High-quality protein with meals is also important for maintaining healthy blood glucose levels. Many people with diabetes benefit greatly by increasing the relative amount of protein in their diet.

Vegetable proteins from sources such as legumes, nuts, seeds, and peas are good choices, as are lean animal proteins such as organic turkey, skinless chicken, and fish. Also suitable are protein drinks that have low sugar levels, such as egg, whey, or yellow pea protein.

**Healthy fats** To prevent damage to the nervous and cardiovascular systems we require quality fats, particularly omega-3 fatty acids. Daily consumption of oils high in omega-3 fats, including olive, flax, and hempseed oils, on salads or in shakes, is encouraged.

**Antioxidants** One to two servings of antioxidant-rich berries and fruits or legumes are excellent choices to counteract higher levels of free radicals produced by elevated blood glucose levels.

**Complex carbohydrates** Avoid simple sugars such as candy, cookies, sodas, and other sweets, as well as white breads, pastas, and crackers. Whole grain breads, cereals, and pastas are better choices. Brown rice, barley, oats, spelt, and kamut are complex carbohydrates that are also good choices.

**Sweeteners** Natural sweeteners commonly available in health food stores such as luohanguo (extract from the *Siraitia grosvenorii* fruit), stevia, and xylitol are excellent substitutes for sugar in baking or as beverage sweeteners. 

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"Avoid simple sugars such as candy, cookies, sodas, and other sweets as well as white breads, pastas, and crackers." and do not adversely affect blood glucose levels.

**DIABETIC-FRIENDLY SUPPLEMENTS**

I recommend a daily high-potency multivitamin and mineral formula (without iron) for everyone with diabetes to supply a base of nutrients involved with glucose regulation.

**Ginseng** Both American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) and Asian ginseng (*Panax ginseng*) have been shown to be beneficial for type 2 diabetes. In a double-blind, placebo-controlled study, type 2 diabetic patients were treated for eight weeks with Asian ginseng or placebo. The 200 mg daily dose was shown to decrease fasting blood glucose levels and hemoglobin A1c (HbA1c) in patients with type 2 diabetes.

Studies have also shown American ginseng to be effective for type 2 diabetes when taken 40 minutes before a meal. Take 200 mg daily.

**Alpha-lipoic acid** This supplement has been shown to reduce glucose levels and treat neuropathy associated with diabetes. Take 600 to 1,200 mg daily in divided doses.

**French maritime pine** A standardized extract from the bark of the French maritime pine has been shown in studies to modestly decrease blood glucose and hemoglobin A1c levels in people with type 2 diabetes. These positive results were achieved using 50 to 200 mg daily.

**Chromium picolinate** A study published in the *Diabetes Care* journal (2006) demonstrated the usefulness of chromium picolinate in improving insulin sensitivity (the body’s response to insulin) and glucose control.

Participants with type 2 diabetes were randomized to receive a sulfonylurea...
diabetic drug plus placebo or sulfonylurea plus 1,000 mcg of chromium picolinate for six months. Not only did those receiving the medication plus placebo experience poorer scores in glucose control and insulin sensitivity, but they also had a significant increase in body weight, percentage of body fat, and total abdominal fat.

Chromium is best used at a daily dosage of 400 to 1,000 mcg daily.

Salacia oblonga A popular herb used by doctors and traditional healers in India for treating diabetes. Salacia oblonga has shown promise for lowering blood sugar and insulin levels.

In one study researchers, on three different occasions, gave study participants with type 2 diabetes a high-carbohydrate liquid meal, the liquid meal plus 240 mg of the herb S. oblonga, and a meal plus 480 mg of S. oblonga. Compared to the control meal alone, 240 mg of S. oblonga lowered the post-meal blood sugar response by 14 percent and the 480 mg dose lowered it by 22 percent. Insulin response (the body’s need for more insulin to deal with increases in blood sugar levels) was reduced by 14 percent and 19 percent, respectively. Take 480 mg daily.

**DIABETIC-FRIENDLY ACTIVITY**

Following a regular exercise program is a must for those with diabetes. Regular activity reduces insulin and glucose levels and shrinks fat cells, creating more effective glucose control. It also protects against cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis, conditions to which people with diabetes are more susceptible. Talk with your physician about an exercise plan that lasts 30 minutes or more daily.

Diabetes can be managed with the aid of a holistic protocol including a healthy diet, exercise, and targeted nutritional supplements. Those on diabetic medications can benefit from a holistic program and should work with a holistic doctor to incorporate these healthy, natural concepts.

Mark Stengler, ND, is the author of 16 books, and he recently co-authored Prescription for Drug Alternatives (Wiley, 2008). meetdrstengler.com

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