Whole grains can control diabetes

Over two million Canadians have diabetes—that’s about six percent of the population. The complications of diabetes are serious and sometimes fatal, but type 2 diabetes can be prevented and controlled.

Several recent studies show that the consumption of whole grains, legumes, vegetables, and fruit can help prevent type 2 diabetes and control blood sugar levels in those with diabetes. The insoluble fibre of whole grains was particularly associated with reduced risk, probably because it reduces insulin resistance and improves glucose tolerance.

Of note, the addition of wheat bran to the diet of diabetics did not improve blood sugar control. It appears that glycemic control is improved only when the grain is left intact. When the structure of whole grain is disrupted, the starch is more easily digested, causing an increase in blood sugar.

Prevention and control of diabetes depend on adopting a lifestyle that includes regular exercise, stress reduction, and a balanced diet, including protein, healthy fats, and sufficient fibre from whole grains, legumes, vegetables, and fruit.

According to a recent study, women with gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM)—a type of diabetes that starts during pregnancy—often develop full-blown diabetes after giving birth. This appears to be related to excess weight gain during pregnancy.

Gestational diabetes occurs in nearly seven percent of pregnancies and usually begins in the fifth or sixth month. Although it normally goes away after delivery, GDM can be unhealthy for the baby as well as the mother. The baby is more at risk of developing type 2 diabetes or being obese later in life, and because babies born to mothers with GDM tend to be larger than average, they are more likely to have to be delivered by Caesarean section, which has risks of its own.

Because women with GDM have a higher risk for diabetes in their next pregnancy and a 40-percent greater chance of developing type 2 diabetes later in life, prevention is key. To maintain a healthy weight and keep blood sugar levels normal, it is essential for women before, during, and after pregnancy to have a healthy lifestyle. A well-balanced, healthy diet, low in simple sugars found in refined grains, cookies, and sweets, is a must, along with regular exercise at a level during pregnancy that is safe for both mother and baby.