

## **Weight Loss and Naturopathic Medicine Part 2**

By Dr. Deidre Macdonald, Naturopathic physician

### **Physical causes – blood sugar regulation**

#### **Blood Sugar and the Battle of the Bulge**

The battle of the bulge is a war many people fight daily. With so many dieting philosophies out there, how does one decide which strategy is right? As a naturopathic doctor, I have had many patients come to see me, frustrated by their failed diet plans. In fact, some diets can set people up for cravings and bingeing. In order to lose weight and not feel too deprived at the same time, it is crucial to learn how to regulate your blood sugar.

Blood sugar problems can easily set people up for weight gain, especially fat around the abdomen. We often refer to hypoglycemia or low blood sugar, but the lows are usually the result of blood sugar fluctuations caused by the typical Western diet. The body tries to keep blood sugar within a tight range. If we eat high carbohydrate foods like sweets, breads, juices and pasta, the pancreas puts out a lot of insulin to quickly transport the glucose out of the blood into the cells. Because the human body is not intended to have such highly refined carbohydrate meals, it is confused by the onslaught of carbohydrates caused by these highly refined foods. Too much insulin is put out and the blood sugar plummets. That is when we feel the symptoms of low blood sugar such as confusion, lightheadedness and spaciness.

The brain then sends red alert signals to the adrenal glands telling them to produce adrenaline. This adrenaline rush accounts for the other hypoglycemic symptoms of shakiness, sweating, irritability, anger, heart palpitations, anxiety, insomnia and more.

Unless a person is just not eating and is running out of fuel, the most common cause of hypoglycemic symptoms is “reactive hypoglycemia”, or the crash after eating a high carbohydrate meal. Years of this pattern cause the body to have to put out excess insulin; often several times a day. The cells eventually tire of dealing with so much insulin, and insulin resistant diabetes, otherwise known as adult onset diabetes can result. The other health consequence of blood sugar imbalances is weight gain.

Insulin is the hormone that tells the body to store fuel in several ways, including storing fuel as fat. The more insulin in a person's body, the more likely one is to pack on the pounds. So keeping blood sugar down and in a healthy range will help to avoid that weight problem. Dietary control is the key to blood sugar management, and there are vitamins, minerals, herbs and healthy oils that can help too.

Key Steps for Balancing Blood Sugar:

- Avoid refined carbohydrates. That means eliminating sugars, sweets, candy, desserts and minimizing fruit juices, breads, crackers and pasta. Increase grains like brown rice, millet and barley.
- Eat regularly. Enjoy 3 regular meals a day and 2 snacks
- Eat modest amounts of quality, low fat protein regularly (2-4 times a day). Protein provides nutrients and fuel without raising blood sugar. Examples of protein are nuts, seeds, beans, tofu, eggs, fish, chicken, red meat, and wild game.
- Include healthy oils like olive oil, flax oil and fish oil daily

Chromium is a trace mineral that has been proven to assist the body to regulate blood sugar and is often deficient in the typical Western diet, but can be taken as a supplement.

Your naturopathic doctor may also recommend supplements to support your adrenal glands.

Recurring blood sugar ups and downs put stress on the adrenal glands and can lead to fatigue and burn out if measures are not taken to control the damage.

Using a strategy of eating whole, healthy foods in a balance of proteins and un-refined carbohydrates, many people lose weight effortlessly and feel more energized. Cravings for sweets and starches quickly fade away, leaving you better able to make healthy choices.

Next week's article focuses on emotional eating and strategies for dealing with cravings and overeating.

*Dr. Deidre Macdonald is a naturopathic physician practicing natural family medicine in Courtenay. She can be reached at The Macdonald Centre for Natural Medicine 897-0235 or [drdmac@shaw.ca](mailto:drdmac@shaw.ca). Web site: [getwellhere.com](http://getwellhere.com)*