

Find Your Blood Sugar Balance

About a third of adults in the U.S. have prediabetes, and most don't know it. The condition ups the risk of type 2 diabetes by 50%, but these 6 strategies can help get you to a healthier place. By Julia Westbrook

What Is Prediabetes? This condition is characterized by elevated blood sugar that is still below the type 2 diabetes range. "Some people hear 'prediabetes' and they think 'pre-problem,' but that's not the case," says Jill Weisenberger, M.S., R.D.N., author of *Prediabetes: A Complete Guide*. Having the disorder, she says, means that you already have insulin resistance. Insulin is the hormone that ferries the sugar from your blood (aka blood glucose) into the rest of the body, so when you're resistant to this hormone, blood sugar rises. At the prediabetes stage, your body can counter the problem by pumping out more insulin. But this diagnosis also means that the special cells in your pancreas (called beta cells) that make insulin have started to burn out. So eventually, insulin production declines and blood sugar levels creep up. "You have the same issues with prediabetes as with type 2, the difference is just the degree," Weisenberger adds. Because the condition usually has no outward symptoms, your doctor will give you a blood test to confirm whether or not you have it.



90% of people who have prediabetes don't know it. Hover your phone's camera over this smart code for a risk-factor quiz.



MAKE PLANTS THE STAR OF YOUR PLATE

Filling up on veggies, fruits, grains, beans and plant-based oils may help improve the steadiness of post-meal blood sugar levels, compared to eating a more meat-centric diet, Danish researchers found. But they note that effective veg-forward eating can still include moderate amounts of lean animal products, like chicken. In fact, this kind of vegetarian-ish diet may lower the risk of developing prediabetes in the first place.



PICK THE RIGHT FATS

People with prediabetes who ate 50 grams a day of monounsaturated fats (MUFAs, found in nuts and oils) saw better insulin sensitivity after 12 weeks versus those who consumed just 20 to 30 grams of these fats, according to a study conducted at the Mayo Clinic. Worth noting: Half of the MUFAs came from olive oil (2½ Tbsp. daily). This oil is known for its anti-inflammatory properties—important because inflammation is linked to insulin resistance.



SNAG MORE ZZZ'S

Getting less than 5 hours of sleep a night increased the risk of progressing from prediabetes to type 2 diabetes by 68%, compared to getting 7 hours, according to a study published in *Diabetic Medicine*. Inadequate rest increases levels of cortisol, a stress hormone that can release stored sugar into your blood for energy. Cortisol also temporarily increases insulin resistance so your body has extra sugar to fuel your groggy self—not great for your health if it happens frequently.



MUSCLE UP

In a study published in *PLOS ONE*, after strength training for 30 minutes, twice a week for three months, 30% of people with prediabetes returned to healthy blood sugar levels. Muscle tissue absorbs sugar out of your bloodstream to burn for energy. So more muscle equals bigger impact.



SCALE BACK

"If someone is overweight—and not everyone with prediabetes is—making diet and exercise changes to drop some pounds can be key," says Weisenberger. "We know that when people lose as little as 5% of their body weight, their insulin sensitivity improves."



SAY "SO LONG" TO SODA

A year after getting diagnosed with prediabetes, 34% of people who continued to drink sugar-sweetened beverages (soda, juice or otherwise) developed type 2 diabetes, while only 8% of those who gave them up did, according to Japanese researchers.