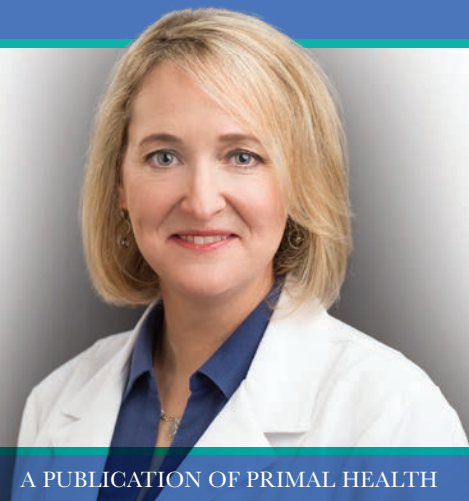


Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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How to Stick With a Healthy Diet This Year

Avoid extreme diets and transition gradually to a healthy way of eating that you can maintain for the rest of your life — and enjoy your food!



It's one thing to know that some foods are better for you than others, but it's quite another to successfully follow a healthy diet. I've covered a lot of ground about *what* to eat in earlier issues of this newsletter, and this month I want to give you some insight into *how* to adopt and stick with a healthy way of eating.

All too often, we think of “diet” as a strict regimen of deprivation, and this sets us up for unpleasant, stressful experiences and failure. This isn't a realistic way of looking at how to improve our eating habits and health.

The word “diet” has lost its true meaning. If you look at the origin of the word in any dictionary, it may surprise you that “diet” comes from the Greek word *diaita*, which means “a way of life.”

Think about that for a moment. If you look at your eating habits as part

of your way of life, it makes sense that trying to constantly deprive yourself isn't going to work.

Another stumbling block can be false notions about willpower. Many of my patients have tried in the past to force themselves to follow an unrealistic diet, and they've concluded that they simply don't have enough willpower to succeed.

Willpower alone will not put you on a healthy eating path. I'm not saying that you don't need to make conscious decisions about what you eat, or that you should throw caution to the wind and give up all control over your food. That would be going to another impractical —

**IN THE NEXT ISSUE:
Best Supplements to Prevent
and Reverse Diabetes**



and unhealthy — extreme. But between unrealistic deprivation and complete indulgence, there's a medium ground that will enhance your health and make you feel better. It's a combination of rational food choices that make it possible for you to eat healthy foods most of the time.

You could think of this medium ground as a dietary happy spot where you can enjoy food while following a healthy way of eating that becomes second nature. To reach

that point, what you eat needs to be tailored to your personal taste buds and the realities of your life.

This doesn't happen overnight. It's a process of learning how different foods affect you, getting used to some new foods, and making gradual improvements.

The process also includes working out ways to overcome your personal challenges. Some common ones are frequent travel, a job that means you eat out a lot, or people who are part of your life but sabotage your healthy-eating efforts.

The Initial Goal

It's important to have realistic expectations. Weight loss is a common goal of "diets," but this is somewhat misguided. A healthy weight is a desirable and health-promoting state, but if the only goal is to lose weight, the process can lead to harm.

You could lose weight by eating a low-calorie diet of junk food, or by starving yourself. In addition to potentially hurting yourself by creating a severe lack of essential nutrients, you would regain weight once you started eating normally.

The approach I recommend addresses the root cause of why most people gain weight and can't lose it — and more. It corrects today's biggest problem with metabolism that leads to obesity, diabetes, other health problems, and a chronic condition of being unwell — what we often mistake for "getting old."

The root cause is elevated insulin: the major hormone that influences what your body does with food, especially carbs. Insulin levels are not typically checked during routine health exams (other

than in some diabetic patients), but they should be. You can ask your doctor to check your insulin the next time your cholesterol and blood sugar get checked.

The first goal of starting and sticking with a healthy diet is to restore healthy function of insulin.

Why Healthy Insulin Function Is Essential

Insulin is essential for life, which is why type 1 diabetics, who can't produce insulin, are treated with the hormone. But in people who are not type 1 diabetics, more is not better.

Here's a vital fact that isn't well known: Blood tests will show elevated insulin levels long *before* they show elevated levels of blood sugar. But because insulin levels aren't routinely tested, the problem isn't detected or addressed soon enough.

When you eat too many carbs, they are converted into an overload of blood sugar. And your body secretes extra insulin to lower the blood sugar.

At this stage, routine blood tests will show "normal" blood sugar. But it only looks "normal" because the extra insulin your body is pumping out is pressuring the blood sugar downward.

This is harmful. High insulin promotes obesity and causes chronic inflammation and internal damage. A big belly is one sign.

Eventually, insulin can no longer pressure the blood sugar downward, and a blood test shows high blood sugar.

If doctors routinely tested insulin levels and addressed any initial, unhealthy elevation with lasting dietary changes,

Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

Editorial Director Vera Tweed
Art Director Jody Levitan
Copy Editor James Naples

For subscriptions and customer service inquiries:
877-300-7849
support@primalhealthlp.com

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Primal Health, LP
3100 Technology Drive, Suite 200, Plano, Texas 75074

most cases of obesity and type 2 diabetes would never develop.

No one knows how many “healthy” people have high insulin because it isn’t widely tracked. But

How High Insulin Harms

High blood sugar is known to be unhealthy. But there’s an earlier sign — high insulin — which is overlooked; it starts causing internal damage before high blood sugar is detected by blood tests.



When researchers recently analyzed all the available research on insulin, they gave their published report a very appropriate title: “Insulin: too much of a good thing is bad.” While insulin is essential for life, studies show that too much causes many health problems because it:¹

- Stops your body from burning fat.
- Makes your body store more calories from the food you eat.
- Raises blood pressure.
- Leads to higher levels of harmful cholesterol.
- Leads to constricted blood vessels.
- Increases chronic inflammation.
- Promotes growth of arterial plaque and dangerous blood clots.
- Increases risk for heart disease.
- Shortens life.

When type 2 diabetics are treated with insulin, they have more heart attacks. This doesn’t mean that they should suddenly stop taking it — that could be dangerous. However, the right dietary changes can reduce or eliminate the need for insulin shots.

I often check insulin levels of my new patients, and I can tell you that elevated insulin is quite common in people with blood sugar in a healthy range.

In case you’re wondering, insulin levels are checked with a “fasting insulin” blood test: blood is drawn after you’ve fasted for 12 hours. A healthy insulin level is under 6 mIU/mL (milli-international units per milliliter).

When blood sugar is elevated, insulin has already been riding high for some time. And then, it’s vital to get both the insulin and blood sugar under control. The same steps I’m going to describe will correct both issues.

How to Start Restoring Healthy Metabolism

Insulin, and later blood sugar, typically rise as a result of carb overload for many years. Reversing the process starts with reducing carbs, meaning starchy and sugary foods and drinks that contain sugar.

What we think of as sugar, such as candy, and what we consider starchy food, such as pasta, bread, and cake, are all treated the same way in your body. Soda sweetened with any type of sugar is another example. Consuming less of these types of foods and drinks is the key to a healthy diet.

By “consuming less,” I don’t mean depriving yourself of your favorite foods. Rather, it’s a matter of finding healthier alternatives that will satisfy you without driving up your insulin and blood sugar.

Eat Often Enough

Another vital step is timing your meals and snacks. I’ve found that

in an effort to lose or manage weight, some people skip meals and feel terrible, but they force themselves to persevere through the day. The fact that they often end up bingeing on high-carb foods late in the day is a sign that all is not well.

To restore a healthy metabolism and stable energy levels, eat three meals daily and have low-carb snacks in between. Generally, you should have something to eat every three hours. But it matters what you eat.

Food Information You Need to Know

In the last few decades, diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and other diet-related diseases have skyrocketed. And an increase in the amount of carbs we eat has been a major driving force.

If we look at what people ate before diet-related diseases became the biggest health problems, here’s a major difference: Healthy civilizations throughout human history ate about half as many carbs as we do today (and none of their carbs were processed, as most of ours are).

An analysis of 229 diets of healthy hunter-gatherers around the world found that carbs made up between 22 and 40 percent of their calories, and fat and protein made up the rest. In today’s typical diets, carbs make up between 40 and 75 percent of calories.²

I’ve found that there are certain types of high-carb foods that we tend to overeat, and these do the most damage because they drive insulin and blood sugar too high and lead to weight gain, diabetes, and heart problems, as well as

making you feel less than your best. Lack of energy, cravings, irritability, poor sleep, and a sour mood can all be symptoms.

Vegetables contain carbs — some more than others. But most vegetables are not the problem. I've yet to meet someone who gained weight and had high insulin and blood sugar because they were eating too many carrots or too many leafy greens.

The culprits that lead to carb overload are these categories of

foods: anything made with grains, including all baked goods, pasta, and rice; snacks made with grains or added sugar; starchy vegetables such as potatoes, corn, popcorn, beans, and peas; drinks with added or natural sugar, including sodas, energy drinks, milk, and sweetened tea or coffee; most alcoholic drinks; and fruit and fruit juices.

I'm not saying never eat these foods; that would be unrealistic. However, I recommend that you limit amounts of the foods and drinks I just listed and find lower-carb or sugar-free alternatives that satisfy you.

I describe these foods and exact amounts of carbs to aim for in the earlier newsletter issues listed in *Related to This Topic* on page 6. The first one, *The Guide to Healthy Eating*, is the most important one to read and get familiar with. But I'm going to give you some new tips on how to gradually adopt a low-carb diet so that you stick with it.

The Right Way to Use Willpower

In my years of helping patients to adopt healthier diets, I've come to view willpower as a limited resource. If you decide to abstain from dessert at one meal, it's quite possible that you'll succeed. Even if you don't initially feel happy about it, you might experience a sense of accomplishment and notice that you don't feel as sluggish or tired after eating.

On the other hand, if you decide to never eat dessert again, it's unlikely that you'll stick with that decision. And when you do indulge, you might well feel guilty. It isn't a realistic approach.

The path to success means find-

ing a way to satisfy your taste buds in a way that enhances your health. That takes some education and a willingness to try different foods. Yes, willpower does play a role, but in a way that is practical and doesn't require a Herculean effort.

The points I cover in the rest of this article are based on what has worked through my years of experience with many patients. And they will help you to avoid the most common pitfalls.

Change One Thing at a Time

It's common to make New Year's resolutions to change more than one major thing in your life. Lose weight, exercise regularly, eat a healthier diet, spend less money, be more organized — the list goes on.

Trying to change many things at once doesn't usually work. It's too much to realistically take on. I've seen so many people try, fail, try to do the same thing again, fail again, and eventually give up. If you want to improve your diet, I suggest focusing on doing only that.

Make Gradual Food Changes

Popular diets most often begin with a strict regimen for several weeks or months, which means sudden, drastic changes in the way you eat every meal and snack. While some people do succeed with this approach, I find that most don't. And I'm not alone.

Many studies have looked at diets for weight loss, lower blood pressure, or other health improvements, and overall they have found that different popular diets all produce results in the short term.³ But the benefits don't often last

Diet Transition Tips

These are some simple ways to stay on track with your own diet goals:



- Don't shop for food when you're hungry, because hunger encourages you to impulse buy high-carb, sugary foods and drinks.
- Don't keep tempting, high-carb foods and drinks in your home.
- When you're going to eat out or are traveling, do some research on menus of restaurants in the area and find dishes that appeal to you and enable you to stick with your diet — and order one of those.
- When you go for dinner at a friend's house, bring a dish that everyone can enjoy but fits your low-carb way of eating. You don't have to explain your diet; just bring a tasty dish. This works especially well for potluck get-togethers.



— people regain weight, or blood pressure goes back up — because they don't stick with the diet.⁴

Rather than trying to make extreme changes in the way they eat, my patients usually succeed by changing one part of their diet at a time, getting used to it, and then making another change, and another.

In this way, each improvement to your diet becomes a new normal. And that means you can stick with a healthy way of eating and continue to experience benefits.

Easy Steps for Lasting Progress

Below are some examples of ways to switch meals, snacks, and drinks for low-carb versions and gradually develop a healthy, low-carb way of eating. Make one change and stick with it for a week. The following week, make another change and stick with that one for a week, while maintaining the change you made the first week.

Keep doing this, making sure that the new foods or drinks are ones that you like. Take the time to experiment and find what suits you.

Drinks: Switch one of your regular sugar-sweetened drinks for a natural, sugar-free version. For example, if you habitually drink regular soda, try one that's sweetened with stevia; Zevia is one brand that has many sodas with familiar flavors, teas, and non-alcoholic mixers. Or sweeten tea, coffee, or plain sparkling mineral water with flavored liquid stevia.

Breakfast: Instead of cereal and/or toast for breakfast, try this: Wilt some spinach in a frying pan with coconut oil and add some eggs, sausage, or another meat or fish

(leftovers work); add some sliced tomato as well, if you like. Or add any other non-starchy vegetables of your choice.

Lunch: Instead of a tuna sandwich with chips, try this: Make a big salad tossed with extra virgin olive oil and vinegar of your choice and eat it with your tuna. Prepare the tuna the same way you would for a sandwich. Chicken salad can work the same way.

Dinner: If you've been eating meat, poultry, or fish with rice, pasta, or potatoes, try this: Replace the rice, pasta, or potatoes with a variety of non-starchy vegetables — roasted, sautéed, or steamed, and drizzled with extra virgin olive oil or melted organic butter. Prepare the meat, fish, or poultry the way you usually do.

Snacks: Instead of pretzels, chips, cookies, or a trail mix with dried fruit, try peanut butter or avocado

on celery. Or dip some vegetables in ranch or another dressing or dip you like.

Desserts: If you like to bake, replace sugar with xylitol powder designed for baking; it's easy to find. To go a step further and eliminate the grains as well as sugar, look for low-carb dessert recipes.

Cravings for Sweet Treats: Instead of reaching for a cookie, try a drink, such as hot or cold green, black, or herbal tea, sweetened with flavored liquid stevia. Try different stevia flavors to find your favorites.

Aim for Progress, not Perfection

No one is perfect. What you eat most of the time makes the big difference in your health. I try to help my patients to gradually transition to a diet with routine meals and snacks that are low-carb. Along the way, if you eat or drink

About Dr. Marlene

Dr. Marlene Merritt's passion for natural medicine is fueled by her drive to help others, and her own experience of overcoming a debilitating heart condition, diagnosed at the age of 20. A competitive cross-country cyclist at the time, she suddenly began experiencing severe chest pains. Forced to quit the sport, she suffered from extreme fatigue and constant pain for another 15 years, despite doing everything that conventional, Western medical doctors told her to do.

And then, the tide turned. A physician trained in naturopathic healing recommended a whole-food vitamin E supplement. A week after starting the supplement regimen, her energy began to return, and the pain began to disappear.

Dr. Marlene is a Doctor of Oriental Medicine, has a Master's in Nutrition, and is an Applied Clinical Nutritionist. She is Board Certified in Bariatric Counseling, and certified in the Bredesen MEND Protocol,[™] a groundbreaking method of reversing Alzheimer's disease. She sees patients at the Merritt Wellness Centers in Austin, Texas, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, trains health practitioners nationwide, and is the author of *Smart Blood Sugar* and *The Blood Pressure Solution*.



something you know isn't the best choice, don't beat yourself up. Just consistently do your best to make the choices that you know are good for you.

Explore New Foods

I follow my own recommendations and wanted to expand my cooking horizons, so I decided I would try a new low-carb recipe once a week. I started finding and using recipes that appealed to me, and I learned a lot of different ways to prepare healthy, low-carb dishes in ways that I hadn't thought of before. I encourage you to try this.

If you bake, I encourage you to try xylitol instead of sugar. One of my patients is a pastry chef, and at Thanksgiving she made two pumpkin pies for her family: one with sugar and the other with xylitol.

Both were a hit, and when she asked her husband and daughter which one they liked best, they both pointed to the xylitol-sweetened pie. When she told them that their favorite pie contained no

sugar, only xylitol, they found it really hard to believe. It just goes to show that low-carb food can be delicious — even traditional desserts. It does require a bit of creativity but the rewards are well worth it.

Beware of Saboteurs

Sometimes, my patients' spouses or other members of their household also want to embrace a low-carb diet. But when they don't, I suggest letting them know what you're doing and that you would appreciate a little support.

If they like high-carb foods that you find hard to resist, such as ice cream or cookies, ask them to eat those treats when they are at an ice cream parlor or coffee shop, or when you aren't home. You aren't trying to change what they eat; you just don't want the temptation.

How to Monitor Progress

If you know that your blood sugar is somewhat elevated or in a

diabetic range, you can monitor progress by checking blood-sugar levels as you go along. Otherwise, keep track of how you feel as you adopt new habits.

It's helpful to start by writing down everything you usually eat and drink for a few days. Then, track changes in your diet and in the way you feel.

How stable is your energy? Do you get cravings? Do you get cranky or irritable, or experience brain fog between meals, even though you aren't hungry? As you lower your carbs and restore healthy metabolism, these types of symptoms should improve.

There are many ways in which we can tell, instinctively, that we're feeling better. Trust your own perceptions and instincts and give your body time to restore its natural metabolism.

A Final Word

By consistently taking steps forward along a healthy path, rather than trying to make radical, disruptive changes, you can transition to a healthy diet that you can stick with. But the exact combination of changes will be unique to you.

If you adopt a healthy way of eating that fits your life and taste buds, it's quite realistic to keep eating that way for the rest of your life.

Related to This Topic

These are some earlier issues of this newsletter that address related topics:

Related Topic	Volume	Issue	Title
A Healthy Low-Carb Diet	1	8	The Guide to Healthy Eating
Healthy Carbs	3	6	The Diabetic's Guide to Eating Carbs
Healthy Meat	3	2	The Diabetic's Guide to Eating Meat
Healthy Fats	4	11	Healthy Fats: Deadly Myths and Life-Saving Facts
Inflammation	4	4	How to Calm Harmful Inflammation
Food Sensitivities	4	12	Food Sensitivities: Hidden Triggers of Many Health Conditions
Gluten	2	3	How Gluten Can Cause More Than 30 Health Conditions

Access these online by logging in to www.NaturalHealthConnections.com.

1 Kolb, H., et al. "Insulin: too much of a good thing is bad." BMC Med. 2020 Aug 21;18(1):224.

2 Kopp, W. "How Western Diet And Lifestyle Drive The Pandemic Of Obesity And Civilization Diseases." Diabetes Metab Syndr Obes. 2019; 12: 2221–2236.

3 Ge, L., et al. "Comparison of dietary macronutrient patterns of 14 popular named dietary programmes for weight and cardiovascular risk factor reduction in adults: systematic review and network meta-analysis of randomised trials." BMJ 2020;369:m696.

4 Alhassan, S., et al. "Dietary adherence and weight loss success among overweight women: results from the A TO Z weight loss study." Int J Obes (Lond). 2008 Jun; 32(6): 985–991.

Vicki wanted to lose weight, but she hated exercise – so how the heck did she **drop 32 pounds** in two months?

If you're having trouble losing 15 pounds or more, just see what happened to Vicki...

Like most of us hitting middle age, Vicki started packing on a few extra pounds each year. Her weight crept up so gradually she hardly noticed. But eventually, Vicki, her husband, and her doctor became concerned. As you might imagine, Vicki's self-esteem took a big hit.

Vicki tried to lose weight by depriving herself of all her favorite foods. She forced herself to eat boring salads and tasteless frozen diet meals. And she exercised like crazy (even though she hated it). But the extra pounds just wouldn't budge.

That's when a friend suggested Vicki try **Smash-It!** This nutrient-infused slimming shake was developed by Primal Labs – a leader in nutritional supplementation.

In the first month alone, Vicki lost 3.5 inches from her belly and 2 inches from her waist, hips, and thighs. And when you hear Vicki tell the story, you'll see why she feels like a different person. "I have so much energy. Oh my gosh, my co-workers noticed within two weeks I was dropping weight," she said. "I was walking around with a big smile on my face."

It's easy to see why Vicki had a big smile. She lost 18 pounds in just 30 days merely by substituting one meal a day with Smash-It! But she wasn't done...

In the second month, Vicki lost an additional 2.5 inches off her belly and waist, and 1.75 inches off her hips. **In only two months, Vicki lost a grand total of 32 pounds!**

What's more, Vicki lost all this weight with only minimal exercise. Which just shows you proper nutrition is 90% of successful weight loss. Because if you're eating the wrong foods, you can't exercise enough to get rid of unwanted fat.

And that's the secret of **Smash-It!**, the delicious meal-in-a-glass that works better than any diet or weight loss program.

Smash-It! has been scientifically formulated to fix the #1 reason most people can't lose weight: **TOXIC FAT CELLS**. Most people get stuck with unwanted pounds, not because of *too much* fat, but rather because of too much of the *WRONG* kind of fat.

This was proven in a landmark study at Temple University. Researchers studied fat cells of overweight people and found them to be toxic, inflamed, and unhealthy. Worse yet, these toxic fat cells "affect blood pressure, blood sugar, triglycerides, and cholesterol," according to *Future Medicine*.

Fortunately, a delicious **Smash-It!** meal replacement shake is an amazing improvement over any meal replacement, protein supplement, or "nutrition shake" you may have tried. In fact, by drinking a daily **Smash-It!** shake, you can:

1. FIX those toxic fat cells for good...
2. FIRE UP your metabolism and supercharge your health...
3. TAKE INCHES AND POUNDS OFF your hips, thighs, and waist, giving you the body you've been dreaming of...

Discover everything
you will get with
Smash-It! on the
next page!



Here's What You'll Find in Smash-It!

First, you'll get 21 grams of **quality protein** in a proprietary Quadsource Blend. This includes whey and pea protein, and even cranberry seed protein to help boost your metabolism and give you the nutrition you need.

Next, a patented *Spectra Blend* contains 29 of nature's most powerful, health-boosting fruit, vegetable, spice, and herbal extracts, including green tea, turmeric, broccoli, bilberry, cinnamon, blueberry, acerola, and many more.

You'd have to eat several servings of fruits and vegetables to get the **antioxidant power** you'll find in *Spectra Blend*. As you know, antioxidants fight the free radical damage that comes with aging. Plus, they increase nitric oxide production to support healthy blood pressure levels and brain function.

In **Smash-It!**, you'll also get:

- ✓ 3 grams of gut-healthy **fiber**, including oat fiber, xanthan gum, and blue agave inulin to help support healthy lipid levels
- ✓ 8 special **enzymes** to help you better digest your food
- ✓ 6 special **probiotics** — "friendly" bacterial strains to support regularity and immune function
- ✓ Biotin and chromium to help maintain healthy blood sugar levels
- ✓ Vitamins A, C, E, B, and D for more health benefits, including support for bone and brain health, as well as healthy blood pressure
- ✓ L-leucine, an amino acid that helps minimize the loss of lean muscle tissue — something to guard against as you age (and when losing weight)
- ✓ And many more vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients to maintain your good health

But what about fat? You know you need fat to feel full and satisfied, so you won't be tempted by unhealthy carbs and sweets. But it has to be *good* fat, not the bad fats typically found in fast and processed foods.



Well, **Smash-It!** contains the absolute **best kind of fat** — medium chain triglycerides found in coconut oil that your body easily burns for energy. And as an added bonus, these fats help support cognitive health.

What's more, the Primal Health team knew that if it didn't taste great, you wouldn't drink it. So, **Smash-It!** comes in rich chocolate, strawberry, and vanilla caramel flavors. It's sweetened with monk fruit that's actually sweeter than sugar. **Smash-It!** contains just one gram of sugar per serving. Compare that to Ensure, with its unhealthy 15 grams of sugar.

With **Smash-It!**, you can **safely and easily melt off up to 15 pounds in just one month**. And enjoy all these benefits in just 30 seconds a day — with minimal exercise and NO impossible-to-maintain diet. What's not to love?

And no worries... Try **Smash-It!** completely risk-free with a no-questions-asked 100% money-back guarantee.

Just like Vicki, now YOU can start shedding those unwanted pounds. Imagine looking and feeling years younger... Fitting into your skinny clothes again... Sounds amazing, doesn't it? Say hello to your new life.

TRY IT TODAY! Smash-It! Nutrient-Infused Slimming Shake
GetSmash-It.com/NHC3

For Faster Service, call 1-888-309-0629
Monday-Friday 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. CST • Saturday-Sunday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. CST

Drugs That Raise Blood Pressure

Could medications be raising your blood pressure? It's quite possible, and doctors can overlook this, according to a recent study at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston.¹

Researchers found that among Americans with hypertension, nearly one in five has taken prescription drugs that can raise blood pressure, which is counterproductive. Sometimes, additional hypertension drugs are prescribed as a “fix.” And over-the-counter drugs can cause the same problem.

These are some drugs whose side effects are often underestimated:

Pain Relievers

Ibuprofen (Advil) and naproxen (Aleve) are among the drugs that can raise blood pressure. They are so common that many people — mistakenly — consider them harmless.

Both these drugs are in the category of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), used for relief from pain, fever, and inflammation. Short-term use can improve healing from an injury or surgery, but long-term use causes trouble.

When used habitually, these drugs accelerate joint degeneration and can lead to liver, kidney, or stomach diseases, as well as potentially contributing to hypertension. But there are drug-free alternatives.

Chronic, out-of-control inflammation underlies chronic pain, such as joint pain, and an anti-inflammatory diet can help to bring relief. For example, fish fats lower

inflammation. Starches, sugars, and refined oils raise inflammation, but eating a low-carb diet with healthy fats and plenty of non-starchy vegetables helps to calm the inflammation and relieve the pain. Moderate exercise also helps.

In the case of headaches, dehydration is a common contributor or trigger, and simply drinking enough filtered water may relieve or lessen the pain. I cover some other common headache triggers and natural remedies in Volume 2, Issue 6, of this newsletter, *Drug-Free Headache Remedies That Really Work*.

Steroids

Steroids are prescribed for autoimmune and severe inflammatory diseases. While they do bring relief, they can raise blood pressure and are dangerous when taken long-term. I've seen people who developed osteoporosis or had their knees or hips replaced because of damage caused by chronic steroid use.

Unfortunately, doctors don't necessarily look deeper into the causes or continuous triggers of autoimmune or inflammatory diseases. Causes can include hidden infections, toxicity from heavy metals, reactions to gluten, other food sensitivities, sleep apnea, and other underlying conditions. And an inflammatory diet may well be a cause or contributor.

The Bottom Line

If you take any over-the-counter or prescription drugs and your blood pressure is high, check if the

elevated blood pressure may be a side effect. If so, ask your doctor if there is an alternative drug or consider working with a practitioner who looks for root causes of chronic conditions. Addressing underlying causes of what ails you may well eliminate the need for the problematic drug.

And keep in mind that a healthy, low-carb diet and exercise can help you achieve and maintain healthy levels of blood pressure.

Types of Drugs That Can Raise Blood Pressure

Prescription Drugs:

- Antidepressants and antipsychotics
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs
- Steroids
- Estrogens
- Stimulants
- Testosterones
- Weight-loss drugs
- Decongestants
- Aromatase inhibitors
- Immunosuppressants



Over-the-Counter Drugs

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs
- Antihistamines

The Most Common Nonsteroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs

Drugs that fall into this category are used to relieve pain, inflammation, and fever. They include ibuprofen (Advil) and naproxen (Aleve).

Acetaminophen (Tylenol), taken to relieve pain and fever, is not a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory. It does not reduce inflammation but is less likely to raise blood pressure.

¹ Vitarello, J.A., et al. "Prevalence of Medications That May Raise Blood Pressure Among Adults With Hypertension in the United States." JAMA Intern Med. 2021 Nov 22.

Let the Sunshine in for Better Sleep

Winter is the time of year when we stay cozy and warm indoors. And when the daylight coming in through our windows is too bright, or we don't like the view, we often block it by drawing window shades or curtains. But this can backfire by disturbing our natural sleep cycles and depleting vitality and mental performance.

Our bodies have built-in clocks — circadian rhythms — that control our natural day-and-night patterns. Nature designed these to help us sleep well at night, but for our internal clocks to work properly, we need exposure to natural light each day.

Natural light changes in the course of a day; it varies in intensity and color. And our internal clocks are designed to work best with such fluctuations.

When we're exposed to artificial light for most of the day, that light is different from nature's version — it doesn't fluctuate the same way. And then, our internal clocks don't respond as well and our sleep suffers.

The Internal Mechanism

Melatonin, our internal sleep hormone, plays a major role in regulating sleep. It helps us to fall asleep and to stay asleep. And our internal melatonin production suffers without enough daylight.

Studies have found that we produce less melatonin when window blinds are drawn during the day. In one study, when people kept their blinds drawn each day for one week, they fell asleep 22 minutes later and slept 16 minutes less each night.

In contrast, people who were in natural light most of the day increased their natural melatonin production in the evening and had better sleep. And they scored

much higher on tests of mental performance.¹

How to Benefit

Letting natural light stream in through the windows will enhance your sleep, mood, and energy. If you have a habit of drawing blinds or curtains during the day, try letting the daylight in.

If the view outside is not appealing, indoor or outdoor plants are a good option. Seeing nature when you look out of a window has been shown to improve mood and mental performance.²

If you're concerned about privacy or need to reduce glare from the sun, get window blinds that filter but don't block light. Another option is to add window film that's translucent, meaning it lets some light in. It's sometimes called "privacy film."

You can also get windows with "smart glass." In these "smart windows," the glass has a special tint that adjusts to the light from outside and filters certain wavelengths. The idea is that excessively bright light will be filtered out, while comfortable daylight will continue to stream through.

And last but not least, don't let chilly weather and early sunsets keep you indoors. Get outside.

If you work in a windowless space, spend time outdoors during lunch breaks and on the weekend. Or make time to go for a morning walk before heading out to work, even if you live in a cold or rainy climate. A walk in the snow or rain can lift your mood.



Artificial Sweetener Makes Some People Hungrier

If you're drinking diet soda or using artificial, zero-calorie sweeteners to lose weight or control blood sugar, it can backfire. That's the conclusion of a recent study of sucralose, a widely used artificial sugar alternative.

Researchers at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles compared the effects of drinks sweetened with sucralose or sugar in different groups of healthy men and women: those who were

overweight, obese, and at a healthy weight. They scanned participants' brains to see how each sweetener activated areas related to hunger and watched how much people ate after consuming each sweetener.³

Among women, and among all those who were obese, sucralose tricked the brain into making them feel hungry and eating more. Instead of artificial sweeteners, I recommend natural sugar substitutes such as stevia or xylitol.

1 Nagare, R., et al. "Access to Daylight at Home Improves Circadian Alignment, Sleep, and Mental Health in Healthy Adults: A Crossover Study." *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021 Sep 23;18(19):9980.
2 Boubekri, M., et al. "The Impact of Optimized Daylight and Views on the Sleep Duration and Cognitive Performance of Office Workers." *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2020 May; 17(9): 3219. 3 Yunker, A.G., et al. "Obesity and Sex-Related Associations With Differential Effects of Sucralose vs Sucrose on Appetite and Reward Processing: A Randomized Crossover Trial." *JAMA Netw Open*. 2021 Sep 1;4(9):e2126313.

Resistance Exercise Boosts Memory and More

Walking is widely promoted for its health benefits — and rightly so — but resistance exercise often gets overlooked. Yet, resistance training is very beneficial for improving blood-sugar and insulin function, strengthening bones, and preventing muscle atrophy that makes people frail and more prone to falls and fractures.

Now, a new study has identified yet another benefit of resistance exercise: Improved memory and overall mental function. Researchers reviewed all the available research and found that resistance-training programs lasting anywhere from 9 weeks to a year produced these benefits in both healthy older people and those with some mental impairment.¹

In these studies, people were supervised by fitness trainers during weight-training workouts, two or three times per week. The workouts were designed to progressively use more weight to challenge and strengthen muscles.

Why It's Good for You

When you do resistance exercise, with weights, exercise bands, or simply by using your body for resistance, the movement activates communication networks throughout your nervous system. And it builds new pathways to your brain, which fires up brain cells and makes them perform more effectively.

This doesn't mean that you shouldn't walk or do more intense aerobic exercise for your heart; you should. But resistance training is also necessary.

Where to Start

It's ideal to work with a trainer, at least long enough to develop a customized program that you can do on your own. There are also plenty of free resistance-exercise videos online, and some health plans have free classes. But you can also start very simply by doing a couple of

simple exercises that use your own weight for resistance:

Squats: Stand in front of a chair as though you're going to sit, with your feet shoulder-width apart and a bit further from the chair than usual. Start to sit down by moving your buttocks backwards as you bend your knees, and try to keep your knees over your feet. Just before touching down on the chair, stand up.

As you're sitting down, bend at the hips and keep your back straight. Your feet should stay flat on the floor, and when you push up, push from your heels. Repeat the movement up to 10 times.

If you can't squat very far without bending over or holding onto something, don't squat as far down. Go only as far as you can while maintaining the form I described above. You should feel your thigh and buttock muscles working.

Push-ups: If you can do them on the floor, either full push-ups or on your knees, do those. If that isn't realistic, do push-ups against a wall. As you get stronger, use a sturdy table or bench, and gradually work your way down to the floor.

It's helpful to look at some videos, which are easy to find online, to see how to do these movements correctly. If you're familiar with resistance exercises but haven't been doing them, start slowly to avoid injury. You have to build back up to where you were, rather than picking up where you left off. The important thing is to make gradual, consistent gains.



Helping Others Reduces Inflammation

Social relationships are known to be good for our health, but some are more beneficial than others. One thing that has puzzled researchers is this: Social relationships don't always lower harmful chronic inflammation, which

underlies many ills, from weight gain and diabetes to heart disease and Alzheimer's. But a new study sheds some important light.

Researchers at The Ohio State University in Columbus looked at data on more than 1,000 healthy

adults between the ages of 34 and 84. And they found that chronic inflammation levels were lower and healthier only when people felt they were able to *provide* support to family and friends. Knowing that they could *receive* support did not lower inflammation.²

1 Herold, F., et al. "Functional and/or structural brain changes in response to resistance exercises and resistance training lead to cognitive improvements — a systematic review." *Eur Rev Aging Phys Act.* 2019; 16: 10. 2 Jiang, T., et al. "Perceived social support-giving moderates the association between social relationships and interleukin-6 levels in blood." *Brain Behav Immun.* 2021 Nov 11;100:25-28.

Q&A

Q: I recently subscribed to your newsletter and was surprised by your frankness about your heart. I'm hoping you could give me some advice regarding how to improve the ejection fraction of the left ventricle of the heart.

—Paul D.

A: I hope that my personal experience can help others to see that improvement may be possible against all odds. However, I am not a cardiologist. Each individual's circumstances should guide the best treatment, but good nutrition and exercise can be extremely beneficial.

The left ventricle of the heart is a chamber from which oxygen-rich blood is pumped out to the rest of your body. With each heartbeat, a normal heart pumps out between 50 and 75 percent of the blood; between 41 and 50 percent is borderline. The percent of blood pumped out with each beat is the ejection fraction; a low ejection fraction signals a weak heart.

Nutritionally, a diet of whole foods that is rich in vegetables provides many helpful nutrients. B vitamins and CoQ10 are especially important for the heart, and liver is a rich food source.

In terms of herbs, hawthorn can help to increase the amount of blood pumped out of the heart, and it can also lower blood pressure. However, anyone who has a severely compromised heart should *not self-prescribe* herbs or other supplements. I really

want to emphasize that. Quality, dose, timing, interactions, and many other variables need to be considered! For example, like Hawthorn, nitrate drugs increase blood flow, and combining the herb with blood-pressure drugs could lower blood pressure too much.

If you take heart medications and want to see how herbs and other supplements may help you, it's essential to work with a knowledgeable health professional to determine the best way to proceed in your personal situation.

Exercise is essential, especially activity that gets you huffing and puffing. But get your doctor's approval before starting any type of exercise program. In addition, ask if you can enroll in a cardiac rehab program in which health professionals will guide you in an exercise program that is right for you.

Q: I would like to know the difference between vitamin K, MK-4, and MK-7. Which one should we look for when using vitamin K? —Jerry C.

A: In nature, vitamin K is a family of nutrients that divides into two major forms: K1 and K2. And there are 10 subtypes of vitamin K2. Two of these — MK-4 and MK-7 — are available in supplements and have been studied.

Vitamin K1 is found mostly in green leafy vegetables. It is essential for healthy blood clotting, so that you don't bleed to death when you cut your finger. When you see "vitamin K" on a supplement or food label, without further explanation, it's referring to vitamin K1. The daily

recommended amount is 120 mcg for men and 90 mcg for women.

Vitamin K2 is essential for calcium to be absorbed by bones instead of being deposited in arteries, where it is harmful. There is no official recommended daily amount for vitamin K2. Studies have found that vitamin K2 supplements — 14–45 mg of MK-4 or 180 mcg of MK-7 — can strengthen bones, reduce fractures, and protect against coronary artery disease.

A Western diet doesn't contain significant amounts of vitamin K2. So, I routinely recommend vitamin K2 supplements, especially with vitamin D. Vitamin D increases absorption of calcium, and K2 directs the calcium to the right place — bones.

You can get vitamin K1 from leafy greens or in a multivitamin. You also need vitamin K2 from a supplement, in either the MK-4 or the MK-7 form, or a combination of these forms.

Do you have a question for Dr. Marlene?

Send your health-related questions to drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com. Please include your first name and the initial of your last name. Although she cannot answer each question directly, Dr. Marlene will select a few in each newsletter and will address other questions and concerns in articles in future issues. Answers are intended for educational purposes only and should not be viewed as medical advice. If you need help with your subscription or have questions about Primal Health supplements, email support@primalhealthlp.com or call 877-300-7849.