

# Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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## Diabetes Drugs and Supplements: Your Top Questions Answered

**Doctors often warn against taking supplements with diabetes drugs. Here's why you shouldn't be dissuaded, and the right way to benefit from supplements that lower blood sugar.**

I've never had a new patient tell me, "I want to keep taking drugs for diabetes for the rest of my life." Quite the contrary, I'm often asked: "How can I get off my diabetes drugs?"

Another common situation is this: A doctor prescribes a diabetes drug, but instead of filling the prescription, the patient comes to see me and asks: "Can I take a supplement instead?"

If you have type 2 diabetes, you *can* improve your health to a point where you either eliminate the need for diabetes drugs or need less medication. For example, I've had many patients who reduced their dose of metformin from 1,000 mg to 500 mg and then to zero — because they no longer needed the drug to maintain a normal level of blood sugar. And others have eliminated their need for other diabetes drugs, including insulin shots.

Can you achieve this by just taking a single supplement instead of a

drug, without changing your diet or any other daily habits that contribute to diabetes or other health issues? I haven't seen that happen. But supplements do play a major role in transitioning off diabetes drugs or eliminating the need for them in the first place.

Some supplements are essential for overall nutrition and healthy function — most people need vitamin D supplements, for example. In other cases, supplements are necessary to correct a deficiency caused by a drug, such as vitamin B12 in the case of metformin. And other supplements, which I'll discuss in a moment, can provide additional benefits by specifically helping to normalize blood sugar.

**IN THE NEXT ISSUE:  
My Low-Carb Diet —  
Fine Tuned**



All told, the right supplements are definitely beneficial in more ways than one: by laying a nutritional foundation for healthy blood sugar; by speeding up the results of improvements in diet and lifestyle; and by enhancing various internal processes that help to prevent or reverse type 2 diabetes.

Reducing, eliminating, or avoiding the need for diabetes drugs is a process — a series of steps. These start with eating a healthy low-carb diet.

## Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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In *Related to This Topic* on page 6, I've listed earlier newsletter issues that describe my diet and the essential nutrients for good health, such as multivitamins, fish oil, and others. Taking supplements that specifically improve blood sugar will enhance the results of your efforts and provide additional benefits, and there's a right way to do it if you're taking diabetes drugs.

The approach I recommend is very doable. So many of my patients — and readers who took those steps at home — have proved that point.

## Why Drugs?

If you're wondering why prescriptions for diabetes drugs are so popular, there are several reasons: The healthcare system doesn't allow for the time that would be needed to educate and counsel patients on the lifestyle changes they need to make. Doctors receive so little education about nutrition and lifestyle that they are not equipped to help patients make the necessary changes. And the system is designed to have a doctor write a prescription.

There's also the patient's side of the equation. In a doctor's office, little if any time is spent discussing drug-free options. And it's easier to take a pill or shot than make significant changes in one's diet and life — at least it seems that way to many people. But there are also many others who would prefer not to rely on lifelong medications.

This has been the case for decades, but now, new diabetes and weight-loss drugs have attracted a lot of attention because of news and social media stories about dramatic weight loss with these drugs.

Before I discuss natural remedies for preventing or reversing

type 2 diabetes, I'm going to give you an overview of how different types of drugs work. I want you to have a sense of the various ways in which they affect different processes in the human body. And then we'll look at what supplements do and how they can help to reduce or eliminate the need for the drugs.

## How the New Drugs Work

There are two major categories of the new drugs: those that are FDA-approved for type 2 diabetes and those that are FDA-approved for weight loss, whether a patient has diabetes or not. In both cases, the recommendation is that the drugs be taken with a reduced-

## New Diabetes and Weight Loss Drugs



Below are some of the new drugs that have gained a lot of attention recently. They are injected once per week.

### Drugs Approved for Type 2 Diabetes

Although these are FDA-approved for type 2 diabetes, they have also been prescribed for weight loss to people who do not have diabetes — an "off label" but legal use.

- Ozempic
- Mounjaro

### Drugs Approved for Weight Loss

These are FDA-approved for weight loss, both for type 2 diabetics and for those without diabetes.

- Wegovy
- Zepbound

calorie diet and exercise — which holds true for all diabetes drug recommendations.

What's striking about these drugs, which are injected once per week, is their success in producing weight loss. They are especially effective at suppressing appetite.

Many people who have lost large amounts of weight report that until they started the shots, they were continually preoccupied with thoughts about food and could not control how much they ate. Now, they don't constantly think about food, and when they eat, they are satisfied with much less food.

These drugs mimic a hormone produced in our gut (GLP-1). The hormone changes signals to the brain, reducing the urge to eat.

The drugs also slow down the time it takes for food to move through the stomach into the small intestine, which prolongs a feeling of fullness. They do this by influencing the nerves and muscles that naturally move food through the stomach. The drugs also lower blood sugar by increasing the release of insulin from the pancreas.<sup>1</sup>

One downside is future weight regain. When the drugs are stopped, a heartier appetite returns. Because of this, both patients and doctors are questioning the need to continue these drugs for life and whether long-term use may have unforeseen consequences.

## Side Effects of New Diabetes Drugs

The most common side effects are related to digestion; nausea is the one reported most often. Vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, bloating, stomach pain, gas, and heartburn are others. It's also possible for

blood sugar to drop too low.

Doses of the new injectable drugs are lower at the start and gradually increase. This helps to reduce side effects, which are mild for some people.

Another, very real risk is this: Because the appetite suppression with these drugs is significant, eating less food can lead to depletion of basic nutrients.

Consequently, it's really important to choose nutritious food. And it's a good idea to take a multivitamin or a protein powder that also contains the nutrients typically found in a multi.

Health risks, which are considered to be rare, include higher odds of thyroid tumors and cancer, pancreatitis (an inflammation of the pancreas), and gallbladder

## Older Diabetes Drugs

Metformin (Glucophage) is the most widely prescribed drug for type 2 diabetes and is the only drug classified as a biguanide. It works to lower levels of blood sugar in three ways: by increasing insulin sensitivity, which helps your body to absorb and use glucose instead of having it persist in the blood; by reducing absorption of sugar in the digestive tract; and by reducing production of glucose in the liver. It may be prescribed with other diabetes drugs.

The most common side effect is diarrhea, especially at the start. Nausea and cramping can also occur. There is also a risk of accumulation of lactic acid in the blood — lactic acidosis — a less common but dangerous condition.

In addition, metformin interferes with absorption of vitamin B12 and folic acid. Supplements can remedy shortfalls, but to ensure that adequate dosages are taken, levels of these two nutrients should be tested, as deficiencies can contribute to diabetes complications.

Often, metformin doesn't work well after age 60. It may also be prescribed for prediabetes: blood sugar that is higher than normal but not high enough to be classified as diabetes.

These are some other oral drugs that are FDA-approved for type 2 diabetes. They help to lower levels of blood sugar through different mechanisms.

### Increasing

**Glucose Absorption:** TZDs, short for thiazolidinediones, increase glucose absorption in a stronger way than metformin. Side effects of TZDs can include fluid retention in the legs and feet and, in some people, higher risk of heart failure. Drugs that are TZDs include:

- Rosiglitazone (Avandia)
- Pioglitazone (Actos)

**Eliminating More Glucose:** SGLT2 inhibitors cause excess glucose in the blood to be excreted in urine instead of being recycled. Genital yeast infections are the most common side effect because sugar feeds yeast. These drugs include:

- Bexagliflozin (Brenzavvy)
- Canagliflozin (Invokana)
- Dapagliflozin (Farxiga)
- Empagliflozin (Jardiance)

### Increasing Insulin Production:

Sulfonylureas stimulate beta cells in the pancreas to release more insulin. Over time, this leads to the beta cells becoming burnt out as a result of being overworked. Weight gain and low blood sugar are common side effects. These drugs include:

- Glimepiride (Amaryl)
- Glipizide (Glucotrol and Glucotrol XL)
- Glyburide (Micronase, Glynase, and Diabeta)



problems. As with any drug, risks of side effects need to be weighed against the health risks of leaving diabetes or obesity untreated.

Among older drugs for type 2 diabetes, there are different categories that work through other mechanisms, which I've described in *Older Diabetes Drugs* on page 3. Which drug may be prescribed depends on individual circumstances.

## Are Diabetes Drugs Necessary?

My patients typically want to avoid taking medications for the rest of their lives, and this is often a realistic goal. But sometimes, drugs for type 2 diabetes are necessary because the health risks of the disease outweigh the risks of side effects. It depends on the individual situation.

In some cases, drugs may be a temporary measure while a patient makes diet and lifestyle changes.

In other cases, the degree of damage from diabetes is such that drugs are necessary on an ongoing basis. But even in these cases, diet and lifestyle changes will always improve health and usually mean that lower dosages or fewer drugs are needed.

That said, there's ample evidence that the right diet and lifestyle can prevent and, in many cases, reverse type 2 diabetes. For example, a review of studies with a total of about one million participants found that these factors reduced the odds of developing type 2 diabetes by 75 percent: a healthy diet, physical activity, not being overweight or obese, not smoking, and not drinking in excess.<sup>2</sup>

These studies also found benefits when diabetes was present: The same factors dramatically reduced risks of diabetes complications, heart disease, and earlier death.

## Drug-Free Diabetes Remission

For anyone who is taking diabetes drugs — including insulin shots — the right diet, lifestyle, and supplements will help to heal the internal processes that are damaged. But this doesn't mean that everything will return to the condition it was in during a healthy youth.

Can diet and lifestyle heal the damage enough to eliminate the need for any drugs? For many of my patients, the answer has been "yes." But it really depends on the individual situation. The degree of damage is one determining factor. Another is whether an individual is able to make lasting changes.

As a rule, it's easier to prevent type 2 diabetes than to reverse it. Diabetes doesn't develop overnight — it takes decades — and along the way, the degree of damage gradually increases. So, the sooner someone takes action to correct the underlying disease process and stop more damage from occurring, the better.

In one British study, 186 type 2 diabetic patients followed a low-carb diet for 33 months. Among those who had been diabetic for less than one year, 77 percent achieved remission of diabetes (normal blood sugar without drugs). Among those who had been diabetic for more than 15 years, 20 percent achieved remission.<sup>3</sup>

In the studies showing that diet can both prevent and reverse type 2 diabetes, supplements were not part of the regimens, but they can produce additional benefits.

## Supplements Work in Different Ways

Supplements don't produce the same side effects as drugs because

### About Dr. Marlene

Dr. Marlene Merritt's passion for natural medicine is fueled by her drive to help others and by her own experience of overcoming a debilitating heart condition, diagnosed at the age of 20.

A competitive cyclist at the time, she suddenly began experiencing severe chest pains. Forced to quit the sport, she suffered from fatigue and chest 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 degree and is board-certified in Nutrition, and is board-certified in Functional Medicine. She is certified in the Bredesen MEND Protocol™, a groundbreaking method of addressing Alzheimer's disease, and is a Proficiency Diplomate in the Shoemaker CIRS protocol for treatment of mold-related illness. She is the author of *Smart Blood Sugar* and *The Blood Pressure Solution*, and co-author of *The Perfect Sleep Solution*. After 31 years in private clinical practice, she now focuses on writing and educating health professionals and consumers to reach more people and positively impact their health.



they work in gentler ways. In some situations, improvements may be noticeable very quickly; in others, it may take more time to see results as internal processes are revitalized and repaired. I've had patients complain that nothing was happening for two weeks and then, suddenly, their blood sugar dropped.

These are some specific supplements that are available as single ingredients and in formulas for lowering blood sugar:

**Gymnema Sylvestre:** This herb reduces absorption of sugar in the intestines, enhances the natural production of insulin in the pancreas, and improves insulin sensitivity.<sup>4</sup> It may also help to lower cholesterol and triglycerides. For full benefits, take it consistently for a year or more.

**Banaba Leaf Extract (Lagerstroemia speciosa):** This herb lowers blood sugar by reducing absorption of sugar in the stomach.<sup>5</sup> It also helps to lower blood pressure, triglycerides, and the most harmful type of "bad" cholesterol, reducing damage caused by elevated blood sugar.

**White Mulberry Leaf Extract:** This herb blocks enzymes that break down starch as well sugar, in a different way than the herbs above. Its chief effect is reducing spikes in blood sugar after meals, which prevents blood-sugar crashes that cause energy sags and cravings between meals. Over time, it lowers chronic levels of blood sugar.

If the herb is taken just before or with a meal, some of the carbs are not digested and are excreted.<sup>6</sup> If you find that the supplement

causes bloating, it's likely because of undigested carbs. Eating fewer carbs can prevent bloating.

**Alpha-Lipoic Acid:** This is an antioxidant found mostly in organ meats. It reduces the amount of sugar in the blood by improving cells' ability to absorb and use it for energy. Alpha-lipoic acid also protects the heart, organs, and nerves against damage from diabetes.<sup>7</sup>

For more detailed information about these herbs and other nutrients that help to normalize levels of blood sugar and healthy metabolism, I encourage you to check out an earlier newsletter issue about supplements for diabetes, listed on page 6.

### Nature's Ozempic

Berberine supplements have recently received a lot of media coverage as "nature's Ozempic" because they work in a somewhat similar way. Berberine is a natural substance found in various plants, such as goldenseal, barberry, and Oregon grape. Berberine supplements are a concentrated form that

has been extracted from plants.

A review of studies with more than 1,000 people found that berberine reduced blood sugar and cholesterol in type 2 diabetics.<sup>8</sup> Another study tested berberine on people who were not diabetic but were overweight and had elevated levels of blood sugar and blood fats. After two months of supplementation with 550 mg of berberine twice daily, at lunch and dinner, levels of blood sugar, harmful cholesterol, and triglycerides dropped, and participants' waist sizes and body fat decreased.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike Ozempic, berberine helps to improve digestion. Like Ozempic, it can calm an overactive appetite but it doesn't produce the dramatic weight loss seen with the new diabetes and weight-loss drugs.

Bitter compounds in berberine influence the same hormones as Ozempic, but in a much gentler way and without the drug's side effects. In addition, berberine improves your natural ability to use blood sugar rather than having it linger in the blood. And through a different mechanism, the supplement can

## Appetite-Suppressing Foods

This might surprise you, but certain foods reduce appetite by acting on the same hormones as Ozempic when they land in our stomach. These are bitter foods such as arugula and other bitter greens, bitter components in broccoli and other vegetables, and bitters added to cocktails or other drinks.



We have bitter taste receptors in our stomach. When bitter foods or drinks come in contact with these receptors, there is a reaction that stimulates production of the GLP-1 hormone which, in turn, signals the brain. The result is better appetite control and lower odds of overeating.

This is a subtle effect, but if bitter foods are a routine part of your diet, they contribute to a healthy metabolism and weight. Once upon a time, we routinely ate bitter foods. Now, sadly, our diets contain much more sweetness, and our taste buds shy away from bitter tastes.

improve athletic endurance. It should be taken with meals.

How to Take Supplements With Drugs

Supplements that are designed to lower blood sugar do work. If you take them with *any* diabetes drugs — metformin, Ozempic, insulin, or any others — it’s essential to monitor your blood-sugar levels at various times of day. This is also true if you take diabetes drugs and make significant changes in your diet.

Otherwise, there is a real risk of your blood sugar dropping too low. And symptoms of low blood sugar — such as dizziness, confusion, anxiety, irritability, hunger, nervousness, shaking, sweating, or a fast heartbeat — can be dangerous.

Some of my patients didn’t believe that my diet or supplements would make a difference, and they were pleasantly shocked by the improvement. Seeing the numbers

drop can be very motivating.

The most practical way to monitor blood sugar is with a continuous glucose monitor, which allows you to quickly see how your diet and supplements are affecting your levels without having to prick your finger for blood samples. If you are taking any diabetes drug and you see your glucose level go down, show the change to your doctor and ask for your medication dose to be reduced. Keep repeating this process until you reach the lowest possible dose or no longer need the drugs.

A Final Word

Doctors often warn against taking supplements with diabetes drugs because of the risk of low blood sugar. That’s the wrong way to prevent the problem. The right way is to lower the drug dose — not to avoid beneficial supplements that help to restore healthy function. To do this,

you must monitor and record your blood-sugar levels, so that your doctor can see that you need a lower drug dose.

Equally important, a continuous glucose monitor can show you how different foods, drinks, exercise, sleep habits, and stressful events influence your levels of blood sugar. Sometimes, it can fluctuate for no obvious reason. But even then, taking the steps that you know will lower it — a little exercise, perhaps, or reducing carbs in your next meal — can keep your blood-sugar levels more stable.

If you’re healthy and want to stay that way, I hope that fasting blood sugar, A1C, and insulin tests are part of your routine check-ups. These can warn you if changes need to be made and give you the opportunity to take action and stay in good health for many years to come.

Related to This Topic

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

Related Topic	Volume	Issue	Title
A Low-Carb Diet	6	1	Your 2023 Guide to Better Health: Part 1
A Low-Carb Diet	6	2	Your 2023 Guide to Better Health: Part 2
Diabetes & Carbs	3	6	The Diabetic’s Guide to Eating Carbs
Diabetes & Meat	3	2	The Diabetic’s Guide to Eating Meat
Multivitamins	2	8	Do You Really Need a Multivitamin?
Supplements for Diabetes	5	2	How to Use Supplements to Prevent and Reverse Type 2 Diabetes
Vitamin D	3	8	Vitamin D: Fight Diabetes, Osteoporosis, Infections, and More
Sleep	5	4	Restful Sleep: How to Get Enough
Stress	4	6	How to Conquer Hidden Stress (page 8)

Access these online by logging in to [www.NaturalHealthConnections.com](http://www.NaturalHealthConnections.com).



1 Anderson, L.A. "How do Ozempic, Mounjaro, Wegovy & Zepbound compare for weight loss?" <https://www.drugs.com/medical-answers/mounjaro-wegovy-ozempic-compare-weight-loss-3570898/>

2 Zhang, Y., et al. "Combined lifestyle factors and risk of incident type 2 diabetes and prognosis among individuals with type 2 diabetes: a systematic review and meta-analysis of prospective cohort studies." *Diabetologia*. 2020 Jan;63(1):21-33.

3 Unwin, D., et al. "What predicts drug-free type 2 diabetes remission? Insights from an 8-year general practice service evaluation of a lower carbohydrate diet with weight loss." *BMJ Nutr Prev Health*. 2023 Jan 2;6(1):46-55.

4 Devangan, S., et al. "The effect of *Gymnema sylvestre* supplementation on glycemic control in type 2 diabetes patients: A systematic review and meta-analysis." *Phytother Res*. 2021 Dec;35(12):6802-6812.

5 Ni, M., et al. "Inhibitory effect of corosolic acid on -glucosidase: kinetics, interaction mechanism, and molecular simulation." *J Sci Food Agric*. 2019 Oct;99(13):5881-5889.

6 Wang, R., et al. "Mulberry leaf extract reduces the glycemic indexes of four common dietary carbohydrates." *Medicine (Baltimore)*. 2018 Aug; 97(34): e11996.

7 Jeffrey, S., et al. "The role of alpha-lipoic acid supplementation in the prevention of diabetes complications: A comprehensive review of clinical trials." *Curr Diabetes Rev*. 2021 Jan 18. doi: 10.2174/1573399817666210118145550. Online ahead of print.

8 Dong, H., et al. "Berberine in the Treatment of Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus: A Systemic Review and Meta-Analysis." *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med*. 2012; 2012: 591654.

9 Rondnelli, M., et al. "Berberine phospholipid exerts a positive effect on the glycemic profile of overweight subjects with impaired fasting blood glucose (IFG): a randomized double-blind placebo-controlled clinical trial." *Eur Rev Med Pharmacol Sci*. 2023 Jul;27(14):6718-6727.

# 5 Important Reasons to Get Green **SUPER FOODS** Into Your Diet



## Reason #1

### You don't eat enough fruits and vegetables.

Eat your broccoli! Can you hear your mother say it? Sure, but do you really want to?

Getting the fresh vegetables you need every day for good health isn't easy, or fun.

Fruits are friendlier, but unless you're eating berries, you're getting too much sugar. Apples, bananas, oranges, grapes and melons are especially high in sugar. And too much sugar impacts your weight, your blood glucose, and your lipid profile.

And yet vegetables and berries are essential to good health. And that's why, today, many people are choosing Primal Labs' **Super Greens** nutrient drink.

This delicious raspberry-flavored powder mixes easily in water, or can be added to a smoothie. It's loaded with nutritious phytonutrients, alkalizing chlorophyll and free-radical-fighting antioxidants.

In less than one minute you get all the green nutrients you need for the day!

## Reason #2

### You want a healthier body chemistry

Did you know your body's natural pH is 7.4? That's slightly alkaline, which is exactly what your body needs for good health.

But your body's natural pH can come under assault from the typical Western diet, which leans acidic, with a pH between 5 and 6.9.

For example, red meats, deli turkey, sodas, grains and processed foods are all acidic foods. Alcoholic beverages are acidic, too. And even some cheeses are acidic.

It's not hard to choose foods that are almost all acidic, and that can push your natural pH levels down.

**Super Greens** nutritional drink comes to the rescue with its concentrated formula of alkalizing superfoods that provide essential phytonutrients, polyphenols, chlorophyll, live enzymes and several bioavailable vitamins and minerals.

All the nutrients in **Super Greens** support good health while maintaining the proper pH.

## Reason #3

### You want health-promoting Phytonutrients

Fruits and vegetables contain over 25,000 different phytonutrients, and up to 8,000 of them are antioxidants that fight the free radicals that contribute to aging.

**More benefits on the next page! →**



# For Heart Health, Bone Health, Digestive Health and Brain Health – Get **Super Greens**!



Until recently, only a relatively small number of phytonutrients have been studied, but that's changing. And already many of these amazing nutrients are known to...

- Lift your energy
- Boost your immune system
- Fight cellular oxidation (aging)
- Improve your digestion
- Support eye and artery health

## Plus...

- Promote brain health
- Nourish your skin, hair, and nails
- And fight food cravings!

Just a quick glance at these important benefits tells you that getting your phytonutrients is essential to good health. And now they're easy to get with Primal Labs' **Super Greens** nutrient drink.

## Reason #4

### You want a nutritious "greens drink" that tastes great

Maybe you've tried a greens drink before and found it to be "awful." I know what you mean. Some of them taste like blenderized grass clippings. And many of them are sickeningly over sweetened.

**Super Greens** is different. It contains a healthy berry blend that tastes like a refreshing raspberry drink. Make a smoothie with a couple of ice cubes and a scoop of your favorite yogurt, and it'll taste like dessert (incidentally, while most dairy is acidic, yogurt is alkaline).

Best of all, because it tastes so good, you'll love making **Super Greens** a regular part of your diet. And you may even want to have it more than once a day. Can you do that?

You sure can, there's no harm, only good.

Use **Super Greens** daily and you won't miss out on the important nutrients you'd get from fresh fruits and vegetables. For many folks, **Super Greens** is a convenient and delicious alternative.

## Reason #5

### You need to watch your weight

One of the biggest problems many of us have is nagging hunger pangs. That's when we reach for a candy bar. Or a bag of chips. Or a sugar-laden drink.

But that's too much sugar, and too many empty calories.

Here's the solution – mix up a glass of delicious **Super Greens**! It's refreshing. It's filling. It's loaded with green superfoods. And best of all, because it's lightly sweetened with stevia, it has ZERO sugar and only 20 calories per serving.

So, use **Super Greens** to support your heart health, bone health, digestive health and brain health. Use it to keep inflammatory responses normal. And also to support a healthy body chemistry that resists aging.

Considering that it's not always practical to get all the fruits and vegetables you need – **Super Greens** offers a convenient and great-tasting alternative.

Try it and see for yourself how much better you feel. Through this ad, you can get 15% OFF your order. And Primal Labs has an unbeatable 100% money-back guarantee. You must be happy or your money back. Period. So, give it a try on my recommendation. I know you'll be glad you did!



Order **Super Greens** at 15% Off  
Today Through This Special Link:  
[www.PrimalSpecials.com/Greens](http://www.PrimalSpecials.com/Greens)

# Herbal Tea Benefits

People have been drinking herbal teas for centuries, and in the last few decades, they've gained popularity as relaxing, caffeine-free drinks. My personal favorites are chamomile and peppermint, but there are many others. They're available as single-herb teas or in combination formulas designed for specific benefits, such as better sleep or stress relief.

Below are some popular herbal teas, some traditional uses, and highlights of some recent research.

## Chamomile Tea

Chamomile tea, known as a relaxing drink at any time of day, may help to relieve anxiety and improve digestion. Drinking it in the evening may help you sleep better. Historically, chamomile has also been used to relieve hay fever and menstrual discomfort and to calm muscle spasms and pain. Research has found that chamomile can also slightly inhibit absorption of sugar and starch.<sup>1</sup>

It's generally recommended that anyone who is allergic to ragweed avoid chamomile, as they are in the same plant family.

## Peppermint Tea

Peppermint tea has a pleasant, refreshing flavor and a natural sweetness. It can freshen breath and enhance digestion. Lab analysis of the plant shows that it contains antioxidants and antibacterial and antiviral substances that can improve immune function.

Animal studies of peppermint

oil, which is more concentrated than tea, show that it may help relieve irritable bowel syndrome by relaxing tissues in the digestive tract.<sup>2</sup> But there have not been any similar studies of the tea.

## Hibiscus Tea

The flavor of hibiscus has been described as tangy and sweet. It's used in jams, jellies, and syrups, as well as tea — also called “sour tea.” The plant contains vitamin C and other antioxidants. Traditionally, hibiscus tea has been used to treat heart disease and a sore throat in African countries.

A study at the Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University, in Boston, tested the effect of hibiscus tea in a group of 65 people with mildly elevated blood pressure. The participants, whose ages ranged from 30 to 70, were not taking any medication to lower blood pressure.

For six weeks, those in the study drank an 8-ounce cup of either hibiscus tea or a placebo drink, three times daily. At the end of the study, hibiscus tea drinkers had lower blood pressure. The tea was prepared by steeping a tea bag containing 1.5 grams of hibiscus tea (Celestial Seasonings) in boiled water for 6 minutes.<sup>3</sup>

## Tea Tips

When health benefits of plants are studied, researchers typically test extracts, which are more concentrated than teas. However, sipping a warm mug of herbal tea can have a pleasantly soothing or revitaliz-

ing effect, in addition to potential benefits from specific substances in a tea. Iced herbal teas are another option if you prefer cold drinks. Equally important, herbal tea can be a flavorful alternative to sodas or caffeinated beverages, and it can help you to stay hydrated.

## How to Choose and Brew Teas

Tea bags are easy to find but for a stronger, more flavorful brew, try to buy loose leaf teas in which you can see flowers or leaves from the plant. A good quality tea, whether loose-leaf or in tea bags, should have a noticeable, pleasant aroma.

Brewing times can be five minutes or more; follow product directions. Explore different herbal combinations to find your favorites.

You may like herbal tea without any sweetener — it's a good idea to try it that way first. But if you do prefer a sweeter taste, stevia, monk fruit, or xylitol are good alternatives to sugar.

## Tea Snapshot

Tea	Main Benefits
Chamomile Tea	Relaxing, reduces anxiety, improves digestion and sleep
Peppermint Tea	Refreshing, good for digestion
Hibiscus Tea	Helps to lower blood pressure

1 McKay, D.L., et al. “A review of the bioactivity and potential health benefits of chamomile tea (*Matricaria recutita* L.).” *Phytother Res.* 2006 Jul;20(7):519-30.

2 McKay, D.L., et al. “A review of the bioactivity and potential health benefits of peppermint tea (*Mentha piperita* L.).” *Phytother Res.* 2006 Aug;20(8):619-33.

3 McKay, D.L., et al. “Hibiscus Sabdariffa L. tea (Tisane) Lowers Blood Pressure in Prehypertensive and Mildly Hypertensive Adults.” *J Nutr.* 2010 Feb;140(2):298-303.

# Ultra-Processed Foods Update

There's some bad news and a little good news about ultra-processed food. But before I tell you about it, I want to clarify what "ultra-processed" means.

Food processing can include various degrees of adulteration. If we think of "processing" as anything that alters a food from its natural state, it would include traditional methods such as cooking, freezing, drying (beans or fruit, for example), making flour from grain, cheese from milk — you get the idea.

These types of processes are not inherently bad. Humans have been using most of them for thousands of years to make food more edible and to preserve it without today's chemical preservatives.

On the other hand, industrial food processing is much more complex. It employs technology that isn't available in your kitchen, such as extremely high heat that no home stove can produce. And it adds chemicals and ingredients that are extracted from food but no longer resemble their original source: high fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils, and added gluten are some examples.

Over the years, more and more ingredients have been added to most of the foods you find in a supermarket outside the produce and fresh meat and fish sections. So, we now have a food supply chock-full of what researchers have labelled "ultra-processed."

How do you tell if something is ultra-processed? The list of ingredients will include items that you

would never find in a home kitchen, such as artificial flavors and colors, emulsifiers, preservatives, modified starch, and others I mentioned above.

In addition, the list of ingredients is usually longer than in traditional recipes. For example, most commercially produced breads contain many more ingredients than the traditional flour, water, and yeast or a starter.

## The Bad News

In recent years, studies have found links between eating more ultra-processed foods and weight gain, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. These studies typically looked at the connection between diet and one of these conditions.

The latest study looked at the risk of "multimorbidity," meaning developing at least two of these conditions: cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. The study tracked the diet and health of more than 260,000 people in seven European nations, for an average of about 11 years.

The conclusion: Eating around 260 grams (about 9 ounces) of ultra-processed foods daily significantly increased the risk of developing not just one, but a combination of diseases.<sup>1</sup>

## The Good News

Awareness of the unhealthy effects of ultra-processed foods is increasing. Experts are currently working on the next update of our official dietary guidelines, which are scheduled to be released in 2024. And the dangers of ultra-processed foods are being discussed.

In the past, our dietary guidelines have recommended types of ingredients to limit, such as fat or added sugar, but there's been no mention of food processing. Now, it's possible that the guidelines may warn against eating too many ultra-processed foods. Not surprisingly, food industry lobbyists are fighting any move to shed a negative light on ultra-processed foods. But at least the topic is being discussed.

## What to Do

Try to eat as much fresh food as possible, and when buying anything that's packaged, avoid products that contain ingredients that you wouldn't have in your own kitchen. Some convenient and healthy options include:

- Fresh vegetables ready to microwave in the bag
- Frozen vegetables
- Washed, ready-to-eat greens
- Guacamole, spinach artichoke dips, and salsa without chemical additives
- Canned vegetables without chemical additives
- Canned fish without chemical additives
- Rotisserie chicken
- Hummus and nut butters
- Ready-made soups without chemical additives
- Canned tomato sauce without chemical additives



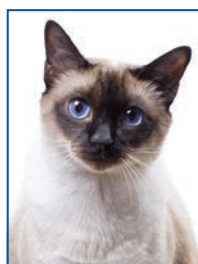
<sup>1</sup> Cordova, R., et al. "Consumption of ultra-processed foods and risk of multimorbidity of cancer and cardiometabolic diseases: a multinational cohort study." *The Lancet: Regional Health Europe*. November 13, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanepe.2023.100771>

## New Cat Facts

I have two cats who are very expressive and playful. But some pet owners think that, compared to dogs, cats aren't very expressive. After all, cats aren't known for enthusiastically running to the door to greet pet parents who are coming home. Cats may seem to be unconcerned about whatever is going on, bored, or occasionally angry. If you think of cats that way, a recent study may surprise you.

When researchers studied facial muscle movements of 53 cats at a non-profit cat rescue organization in Los Angeles, they identified at least 276 different expressions. Cats communicated in many ways, both with other cats and with humans who were playing with them.<sup>1</sup>

The researchers believe that cats become more expressive as they become domesticated. Maybe we aren't always reading their signals.



## Is Your Doctor Optimistic?

When patients are overweight or obese, changing diet and lifestyle to lose weight is a first-line recommendation for lowering blood pressure and blood sugar. But the way a doctor presents this to a patient plays a significant role in whether or not the patient takes action.



A British study at the University of Oxford analyzed recordings of doctors offering patients a 12-week, no-cost, behavioral weight loss program. They compared three ways that physicians presented the program: as “good news” that patients had an opportunity to benefit from; as “bad news” that patients’ obesity was a problem and a challenge to overcome; or in a neutral way, neither positive nor negative.

Among those who were offered the program as “good news,” 87 percent enrolled. In the other two groups, fewer than half enrolled. They all lost some weight, but more people could have benefited had the initial offer been an optimistic one.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, doctors are not trained on how to present diet and lifestyle changes for better health. So, it's up to patients to seek out and work with healthcare professionals who will encourage and help them to make positive diet and lifestyle changes when these are necessary.

## Belly Fat Traps Vitamin D



I've always emphasized the need to get vitamin D levels tested, and to take vitamin D doses based on individual needs. Now, a recent Italian study adds to the evidence showing that testing is essential.

It has been known for some time that people with excess body fat have lower levels of vitamin D. The new study found something more specific: the more deep belly fat a person has, the lower their vitamin D levels are likely to be, even with supplementation.

In a group of 58 patients who were overweight or obese, researchers tested vitamin D levels at the outset and found that all the participants were deficient in vitamin D. They also measured belly fat, using ultrasound and other markers.

The vitamin D dosages were not customized. All participants received 50,000 IU of vitamin D

per month. Testing after six months of supplementation showed that half the patients were still deficient — notably those with the most belly fat.<sup>3</sup>

Researchers concluded that deep belly fat may trap vitamin D, making it unavailable for use throughout the body. This type of fat is the most dangerous because it generates chronic inflammation. A low-carb diet can help to reduce overall excess fat, fat in the belly area, and chronic inflammation.

Testing vitamin D levels, customizing dosages of supplements, retesting every few months, and adjusting dosage as necessary can help to solve the problem. If your insurance plan doesn't cover testing that often, these are some inexpensive direct-to-consumer testing services:

[www.ultalabtests.com](http://www.ultalabtests.com)

[www.lifelinescreening.com](http://www.lifelinescreening.com)

[www.directlabs.com](http://www.directlabs.com)

1 Scott, L., et al. “Feline faces: Unraveling the social function of domestic cat facial signals.” *Behav Processes*. 2023 Oct 18;213:104959. 2 Albury, C., et al. “Relationship Between Clinician Language and the Success of Behavioral Weight Loss Interventions: A Mixed-Methods Cohort Study.” *Ann Intern Med*. 2023 Nov 7. doi: 10.7326/M22-2360. Online ahead of print. 3 Cominacini, M., et al. “Unraveling the Connection: Visceral Adipose Tissue and Vitamin D Levels in Obesity.” *Nutrients*. 2023 Oct 5;15(19):4259.

# Q&A

**Q: I'm overweight and I was diagnosed with sleep apnea six months ago. I started using a CPAP machine and it helped. I slept better and had more energy, but that effect seems to have worn off. I wake up feeling tired, like I did before. I know I need to lose weight. Do you have any other advice? — Henry G.**

**A:** I'm glad you started using a CPAP machine after being diag-



nosed with sleep apnea. So many people resist the CPAP when it would really help them.

As you initially experienced, the CPAP machine can work. However, it may need adjustment. This is the most common issue I've seen with patients who experienced CPAP benefits for a while, but then the symptoms seemed to return.

CPAP machines have different settings that need to be calibrated in your doctor's office for your individual needs. What works best for you can change over time, so the machine needs to be recalibrated. I suggest that you see your doctor to check this.

Another thing to keep in mind is that a CPAP machine needs maintenance. Check the instructions for your machine and make sure you are following all the steps that need to be done.

For the longer term, losing weight will help most cases of

sleep apnea. For example, weight loss in the waist can reduce fat in the tongue, which can be a problem. To experience a benefit, you don't need to reach your lowest weight when you were a teenager or in your twenties. *Some* weight loss will start to make a difference.

Each person reacts differently, but in terms of averages, studies show that losing at least 5 percent of your body weight produces an improvement. As an example, for a 200-pound person, that would mean losing 10 pounds.

Losing more weight, especially more than 10 percent of body weight, produces a much bigger improvement. For some people, sleep apnea does resolve with enough weight loss.

That said, some less common types of sleep apnea don't improve with weight loss. And a thin person can suffer from sleep apnea because of the structure of their body around the upper airway. Less often, another medical condition may contribute to the condition.

I definitely encourage you to see your doctor to recalibrate your machine. Weight loss is too big a topic to address here. Stay tuned for the next issue of this newsletter, which will look at ways to fine tune my low-carb diet to get the full benefits, including weight loss.

**Q: I have high blood pressure. Should I take nitric oxide supplements? — Oryst J.**

**A:** I believe the type of supplements you're referring to are nitric oxide boosters. These are nutrients that help your body to make nitric oxide, a gas that your body

naturally produces to dilate blood vessels. Dilated blood vessels make it easier for blood to flow, and this helps to lower blood pressure.

Supplements that boost nitric oxide can contain different nutrients. For example, some contain beetroot extract. Beets naturally contain nitrates, which are nutrients that can increase your internal nitric oxide production. Nitrates are also found in other foods, such as dark green leafy vegetables and celery.

If low levels of nitric oxide are causing high blood pressure, adding nitrate-rich foods or supplements to your diet may help to lower your blood pressure. On the other hand, if your diet already contains enough nitrates, taking more in a supplement may make little or no difference.

Lack of nitrates is only one factor that can contribute to high blood pressure. Others may be eating a high-carb diet, stress, lack of sleep or physical activity, and/or an underlying health condition that is undetected and untreated.

## Do you have a question for Dr. Marlene?

Send your health-related questions to [drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com](mailto: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](mailto:support@primalhealthlp.com) or call 877-300-7849.