

# Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

VOLUME 8 | ISSUE 01

A PUBLICATION OF PRIMAL HEALTH



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## The Latest on Weight Loss

**New weight-loss drugs have attracted much attention, but there are foods and herbs that can produce similar beneficial effects in a much gentler way and without the side effects.**



Weight loss has undergone what could well be called a revolution with the introduction of new drugs — classified as GLP-1 drugs. Such drugs were initially prescribed for type 2 diabetes and, more recently, for weight loss. I covered their use for diabetes in an earlier issue: the last one listed in *Related to This Topic* on page 6. In this issue, I'm focusing on weight loss.

First, let me dispel a common misconception about my approach. Often, when patients come to see me, they assume that I'm against the use of all medical drugs. This is not the case. I do explain the (often overlooked) downsides of many common drugs, and the benefits of natural alternatives. But I also recognize that drugs can save lives.

In some cases, drugs can be a temporary remedy to stop dangerous progression of a condition: high blood sugar, for example. And over time, changes in diet and lifestyle may enable a patient's health to be restored to a point where, ideally, the drugs are no longer needed. Some-

times, lower drug doses or fewer drugs may still be needed. Generally, the more damage that has been done by a disease, the harder it is to completely eliminate the need for drugs. However, significant improvement is always possible.

The problem is, drugs are too often relied upon as the only remedy. Several things contribute to this: As a culture, we like quick fixes, and natural approaches require more effort and time. Most doctors aren't educated in nutrition. And our health-care system doesn't allow time for patients to receive guidance to successfully improve their lifestyle.

At the same time, most of the food in supermarkets and on affordable restaurant menus is not what our bodies need for good health.

Food additives and inflammatory oils disrupt healthy digestion, increase inflammation, and contribute to weight gain. These are

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**IN THE NEXT ISSUE:**  
**Answers to Your**  
**Top Health Questions**

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everywhere, so it takes some effort to eat healthy, whole foods instead. Weight loss takes work.

So it isn't surprising that the new weight-loss drugs have surged in popularity. While the amount of weight loss with the drugs varies and some people can't tolerate the side effects, many people have lost a lot of weight.

Don't get me wrong: I'm all for taking a natural, drug-free approach to weight loss, and I'm going to describe some practical ways to do so

later in this issue. But first, I want to give you an overview on what the new drugs can and can't do, so that you have a well-rounded picture.

There's another reason why I want you to be aware of how the GLP-1 drugs work: There are foods and supplements that produce a similar effect. But the natural substances do so in a much gentler way, without the same side effects and other downsides of the drugs.

## How the New Weight Loss Drugs Work

GLP-1 is a hormone our bodies naturally release after we eat. GLP-1 drugs mimic the action of this hormone.

Our naturally-produced GLP-1 hormone helps to regulate blood sugar after meals by stimulating release of insulin. It also slows digestion to produce a feeling of fullness and sends signals to the brain that reduce appetite. In a nutshell, our GLP-1 hormone tells us that we've eaten enough.

The effects of the drugs are similar but exaggerated. Although the drugs mimic our own hormone, they have a much stronger, longer-lasting impact.<sup>1</sup>

The effects of our natural GLP-1 hormone may last a few minutes to an hour or two after a meal, depending on what we eat (more about that in a moment). But the effects of a GLP-1 drug may last a whole day, or a week. This is why some of these drugs are injected once daily or once weekly.

The exaggerated, prolonged stimulation of the hormone's effect can produce side effects. Most often, these are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or constipation, and possible reactions at the injection site.

## Pros and Cons

Studies have found that in addition to reducing weight and controlling blood sugar in type 2 diabetics, GLP-1 drugs offer some other benefits. These include reduced risk for heart attacks, strokes, kidney disease, liver disease, and death from heart disease. Obesity itself contributes to all these risks.

GLP-1 drugs can also lessen addictive behavior, such as over-eating, smoking, heavy drinking, or gambling. And there have been reports that they may lower risk of suicidal thoughts or actions.

Promising as all this sounds, the drugs aren't magic. Not every patient who is prescribed a GLP-1 drug for weight loss experiences results. And some stop taking the drugs because they are disappointed by lack of quick weight loss or can't tolerate side effects.

To help reduce side effects, the initial dose of a GLP-1 drug is low and is increased gradually over a period of months. Once the full dose is reached, there is a greater effect.

The intensity of side effects varies, from none to severe. Although nausea, vomiting, and digestive problems may

### Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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## GLP-1 Drugs

While it's famous for weight loss, Ozempic is FDA-approved only for type 2 diabetes. Below are some GLP-1 drugs approved for weight loss. They should be used with a healthy diet and exercise.

**Wegovy:** injected once per week  
**Zepbound:** injected once per week  
**Saxenda:** injected once per day



lessen or disappear with time, more serious adverse effects are also possible.

Gastroparesis — stomach paralysis that stops or significantly slows food from moving through the digestive tract — can be severe. It is one of the adverse effects that have led to patients suing drug manufacturers. Other serious side effects include blockages in the intestines, sudden vision loss, blood clots, and inflammation of the pancreas.

Once any drug becomes widely used, it's common for effects that were not initially observed to be detected — for better or worse. In the case of GLP-1 drugs, there are some significant pluses, and some minuses.

As with any other treatment, it's important to keep both risks and benefits in mind. And it's always essential to view these in the context of each individual's situation.

Someone who is overweight or obese and at high risk for, or already suffering from, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, or another obesity-related condition can potentially reap health benefits.

Could people in such situations achieve the same goal with diet and lifestyle changes? It's possible, but so far, they haven't. Meanwhile, excess weight is contributing to ongoing damage in their body. Perhaps losing some weight with the help of a GLP-1 drug will encourage the person facing such health risks to adopt a healthier diet and lifestyle.

On the other hand, the picture is very different for someone who is healthy but wants to lose 20 or 30 pounds to fit into their skinny jeans. In fact, GLP-1 drugs are not

FDA-approved for people in such a situation. Despite this, people do get off-label prescriptions — although they shouldn't.

## **A Nutritional Pitfall to Avoid**

Appetite suppression is one key way that GLP-1 drugs lead to weight loss. And if nausea or vomiting are side effects, it's difficult to eat much. This opens the door to a potentially serious pitfall: lack of nutrients.

With decreased appetite, obviously, you eat less. If the food that you do eat is not really nutritious, you will become malnourished. This can also be a problem after weight-loss surgery.

The solution is to be diligent about choosing whole, nutritious foods, eating enough protein, and avoiding junk food that will fill you up without providing needed vitamins and minerals. Protein powder and a multivitamin can help to fill gaps but they're not substitutes for wholesome food.

## **Weight-Loss Drugs in the Long Term**

For people who successfully lose weight with GLP-1 drugs, there is another major challenge: How to keep the weight off.

Weight regain is a major problem, and so far, there isn't a medical solution. Some people are experimenting with microdosing: taking lower doses of a GLP-1 drug after they've achieved their weight-loss goal. But there isn't enough evidence for any specific medical guidelines or recommendations.

Maintaining a healthy weight boils down to following the right diet and lifestyle — which would be different from someone's diet

and lifestyle before they started on their weight-loss journey with GLP-1 drugs. After all, those habits are what led to weight gain.

One strategy, which is recommended, is to adopt a healthier diet and get regular exercise when starting the drugs. But as I mentioned earlier, our healthcare system is not designed to provide individual guidance to help people figure out how to do this in the real world.

In theory, another option for preventing weight regain is for people to continue taking GLP-1 drugs indefinitely. Unfortunately, we have no data on how ongoing use of these drugs, for years, will affect health. So, anyone using the drugs this way is a guinea pig.

Before I start describing natural alternatives, there is another important factor that can help to prevent weight regain. And that's muscle.

## **Muscle, Weight Loss and Regain**

When we lose weight, some of that loss is fat and some is muscle. The ideal scenario is to lose as much fat as possible while preserving as much muscle as possible.

Muscle does more than keep us strong. It maintains our resting metabolic rate: the number of calories we burn at rest, just to stay alive — keeping the heart pumping, the blood flowing, the brain working, and so on. Generally, this makes up the biggest portion of the calories we use every day.

When muscle is lost, our metabolic rate drops, meaning we burn fewer calories just by staying alive. If that drop is significant, it's virtually impossible to make up for it with exercise. And when a lot of weight is lost quickly, more



muscle is lost and there is a bigger drop in metabolic rate compared to slower weight loss. The slowdown in metabolic rate sets the stage for weight regain.

You may remember the TV show, *The Biggest Loser*. Participants lost a lot of weight very quickly with a low-calorie diet and grueling aerobic exercise. Almost all of them later regained a significant amount of weight, and some ended up weighing even more than they did before the show.<sup>2</sup>

The healthiest way to lose weight is slowly: about one pound per week. At the same time, these steps help to maintain muscle and metabolic rate: Eat plenty of protein, which contains building blocks of muscle tissue. Stick with whole foods that are naturally low in carbs. And do regular resistance exercise to challenge muscles, which helps to maintain them. Depending on the intensity of your

resistance workouts, you may even build some muscle.

I should mention that women need not be concerned about bulk-ing up too much. Only dedicated competitive female bodybuilders develop noticeably large muscles. Rather, be concerned about losing muscle and becoming frail. Muscle also helps to support bone and enables you to do more weight-bearing movement, such as walking, which helps to preserve healthy bones.

Drugs can't replace the need for protein, other nutritious foods, and resistance exercise. In fact, these steps are especially important for anyone using GLP-1 drugs.

Research shows that more muscle is lost during weight loss with GLP-1 drugs than with a non-drug approach. We naturally lose some muscle as we age, but when weight is lost with GLP-1 drugs, we can lose more than four times as much muscle.<sup>3</sup>

This extra muscle loss could stem from faster weight loss with the drugs. But it isn't clear whether there is another mechanism at play that makes the drugs increase muscle loss, thereby slowing metabolic rate more than drug-free weight loss. Either way, the reduced metabolic rate significantly contributes to weight regain.

## Losing Weight Without Drugs

My low-carb way of eating is the foundation for losing excess weight and keeping it off. My patients and many of my readers have routinely succeeded by adopting this strategy.

My low-carb approach isn't a restrictive way of eating and it can — and should — be tailored to your own taste preferences and daily routines. It boils down to restricting the types of carbohydrates that are the top sources of carb overload and metabolic disruption that lead to excess weight and other health issues.

If you aren't familiar with my low-carb diet, I encourage you to check out earlier issues of this newsletter, listed in *Related to This Topic* on page 6. In those issues, I describe the underlying mechanisms in detail and give a specific way to reduce sources of carb overload that lead to poor health.

Exercise is another essential, and all types of activity counts, including chores around the house such as cleaning and organizing closets, the garage or the basement. And we each have different types of physical activity we may enjoy, whether that's dancing, golf, pickleball, ping pong, other games, hiking on trails (in winter, too), or speed walking around the neighborhood.

### 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.



For resistance training, there are weights, resistance bands, exercises that use your own body for resistance (such as push-ups or squats), and different structured forms of movement. Yoga or Pilates, for example, can include resistance exercises. There are many online and in-person classes

that combine resistance and aerobic movement.

The most important thing is to choose activities that you enjoy. That way, you’re more likely to stick with them and make progress. In addition to being good for your circulation, blood-sugar and blood-pressure levels, and muscles,

exercise enhances your appetite for whole, natural foods.

Natural Boosters of GLP-1 Hormones

Foods and drinks that have a bitter taste, such as many vegetables, green tea, and coffee, stimulate our natural production of GLP-1.<sup>4</sup> One simple way to enhance weight loss using this mechanism is to take a supplement of digestive bitters — also called Swedish bitters — just before or at the start of a meal. Bitters also enhance digestion.

Fiber is another natural booster of our own GLP-1 hormones,<sup>5</sup> and eating adequate fiber with each meal can extend the beneficial effect of those hormones. There’s much room for improvement in this department, as only 5 percent of men and 9 percent of women are getting the recommended daily amount of dietary fiber: 21 to 25 grams for women and 30 to 38 grams for men.<sup>6</sup> For how to get more, see *Fiber Sources* at left.

Certain herbs — listed below — also enhance our natural production of GLP-1 hormones. Although I’m listing several herbs, I recommend trying only one at a time and seeing how you do. This will help to avoid any possible digestive upset.

For each of these herbal GLP-1 enhancers. I’ve also listed other benefits of each herb. When choosing one, try an herb with benefits that suit your personal needs.

**Gentian:** The herb has been used traditionally in Chinese medicine to enhance digestion.<sup>7</sup> It’s available as a single ingredient in capsules and tinctures, with or without alcohol, and in digestive formulas.

Fiber Sources

Fiber is in all plant foods, such as the ones below. For cereal, I don’t recommend more than 1/3 cup, as it is a rich source of carbs.

When increasing fiber, do so gradually to avoid digestive upset.



Food	Serving Size	Fiber Content
Bran cereals (check Nutrition Facts)	1/3 cup	10–12 grams
Avocado, about 5 ounces	1	10 grams
Acorn squash, cooked	1 cup	9 grams
Blackberries or raspberries	1 cup	8 grams
Split peas	1/2 cup	8 grams
Lima, black, or pinto beans	1/2 cup	7 grams
Garbanzo beans	1/2 cup	6 grams
Black-eyed peas	1/2 cup	6 grams
Amaranth grain	1/4 cup	6 grams
Brussels sprouts	1 cup	6 grams
Turnip, mustard, or collard greens, cooked	1 cup	5 grams
Cauliflower or broccoli, cooked	1 cup	5 grams
Spinach, beet greens, or Swiss chard, cooked	1 cup	4 grams
Cabbage, green or red, cooked	1 cup	4 grams
Almonds, about 23 nuts	1 ounce	4 grams
Asparagus, chopped	1 cup	3 grams
Kale, cooked	1 cup	3 grams
Bell peppers, chopped, raw	1 cup	3 grams
Zucchini, cooked	1 cup	3 grams
Romaine lettuce, chopped	2 cups	2 grams
Celery, chopped	1 cup	1.5 grams

**Ginseng:** Studies have found that it helps to relieve fatigue, angina, and menopausal symptoms; improves physical function and sexual function; lowers blood sugar; reduces inflammation; and protects against respiratory diseases.<sup>8</sup>

**Berberine:** A component of numerous plants, berberine has gained popularity as a “natural Ozempic.” It lowers blood sugar and helps to balance microorganisms in the intestines.<sup>9</sup>

**Turmeric:** This well-researched herb has been shown to provide relief for many conditions, including high blood sugar, chronic inflammation, and arthritis, and to protect against dementia and inflammatory conditions.<sup>10</sup> For good absorption, look for a patented form such as LongVida, Theracurmin, or

Meriva. Supplements may be called “turmeric” or “curcumin,” which is the active component in turmeric root. Turmeric is also a spice which can be added to foods and drinks.

**Fenugreek:** The herb helps to reduce blood sugar, triglycerides, blood pressure, and unhealthy cholesterol levels. This collection of symptoms makes up metabolic syndrome, which increases risks for diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.<sup>11</sup>

**Cinnamon:** Also used as a spice, cinnamon enhances our internal production of antioxidants, reduces inflammation,<sup>12</sup> and helps to normalize blood sugar.

**Ginger:** Studies have found that ginger reduces blood sugar, inflammation, and unhealthy cholesterol, and lowers risk for heart disease.<sup>13</sup>

**A Final Word**

I’ve covered a lot of ground, but there are a few other important components of healthy weight loss. Among them are getting adequate sleep and avoiding too much stress. Avoiding toxins in food, by eating organic, can also make a big difference because real food is naturally more filling yet has fewer calories. The chart below lists earlier newsletters on these topics.

Despite some of the dramatic results produced by GLP-1 weight-loss drugs, a healthy diet and exercise will always be essential staples that continue to enhance health for years to come — without any adverse side effects.

### Related to This Topic

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

Related Topic	Volume	Issue	Title
A Healthy Diet	7	1	My Low-Carb Diet — Fine-Tuned
Healthy Fats	4	11	Healthy Fats: Deadly Myths and Life-Saving Facts
Eating Meat	3	2	The Diabetic’s Guide to Eating Meat
Food Sensitivities	7	6	Food Sensitivities: Are They Hurting You?
Toxins in Food	1	7	The 21-Day Energy Restoration Plan
Weight Loss Blocks	7	2	How to Unblock Weight Loss
Weight Loss Myths	5	3	3 Big Myths about Weight Loss — and the Facts
Sleep	2	2	The 10-Minute Sleep Solution
Exercise	1	7	The Secret to Effective Aerobic Exercise (page 7)
Diabetes	6	12	Diabetes Drugs and Supplements: Your Top Questions Answered

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



1 Zheng, Z., et al. “Glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor: mechanisms and advances in therapy.” *Signal Transduct Target Ther.* 2024 Sep 18;9(1):234.

2 Fothergill, E., et al. “Persistent metabolic adaptation 6 years after “The Biggest Loser” competition.” *Obesity (Silver Spring).* 2016 Aug;24(8):1612-9.

3 Prado, C.M., et al. “Muscle matters: the effects of medically induced weight loss on skeletal muscle.” *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology.* Volume 12, Issue 11, 785–787.

4 Rezaie, P., et al. “Effects of Bitter Substances on GI Function, Energy Intake and Glycaemia – Do Preclinical Findings Translate to Outcomes in Humans?” *Nutrients.* 2021 Apr 16;13(4):1317.

5 Bodnaruc, A.M., et al. “Nutritional modulation of endogenous glucagon-like peptide-1 secretion: a review.” *Nutr Metab (Lond).* 2016 Dec 9;13:92.

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7 Shin, M-H., et al. “Gentiana scabra extracts stimulate glucagon-like peptide-1 secretion via G protein-coupled receptor pathway.” *BioChip J* 6, 114–119 (2012).

8 Li, Z., et al. “Ginseng and health outcomes: an umbrella review.” *Front Pharmacol.* 2023 Jul 3;14:1069268.

9 Araj-Khodaei, M., et al. “Berberine-induced glucagon-like peptide-1 and its mechanism for controlling type 2 diabetes mellitus: a comprehensive pathway review.” *Arch Physiol Biochem.* 2024 Dec;130(6):678-685.

10 Hewlings, S.J., et al. “Curcumin: A Review of Its Effects on Human Health.” *Foods.* 2017 Oct 22;6(10):92.

11 Fakhr, L., et al. “Effects of fenugreek supplementation on the components of metabolic syndrome: A systematic review and dose-response meta-analysis of randomized clinical trials.” *Pharmacol Res.* 2023 Jan;187:106594.

12 Zhu, C., et al. “Impact of Cinnamon Supplementation on cardiometabolic Biomarkers of Inflammation and Oxidative Stress: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials.” *Complement Ther Med.* 2020 Sep;53:102517.

13 Anh, N.H., et al. “Ginger on Human Health: A Comprehensive Systematic Review of 109 Randomized Controlled Trials.” *Nutrients.* 2020 Jan 6;12(1):157.



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# Tips for a Healthier New Year

New Year's resolutions are often attempts to make sweeping changes that aren't realistic. Instead, I prefer to view this as a good time to develop some new habits that take you in a healthier direction.

I've found that making small but meaningful changes works well. For example, if you usually snack on chips and dip, try some vegetables that aren't starchy (not potatoes) with your favorite dip. Vegetables can be raw, roasted, microwaved, or steamed.

Once that becomes part of your routine, check the ingredients in your dip. If it contains strange additives that aren't recognizable foods, or refined oils I mention below, look for a similar dip without those ingredients. Or you could get more adventurous and make your own.

Once you're used to that, think of another way to add

healthier food to your diet. Perhaps you buy a prepared meat or chicken dish but cook some fresh vegetables instead of fries as a side dish. And later, progress to making full meals from scratch.

At some point, think of a way to bring more movement into your life. Perhaps it's dancing to your favorite song in your living room, going for a walk more often, or trying a tai chi class. Or maybe it's parking at the far end of a mall parking lot. Each little step puts you on a healthier path, one that makes you feel better and encourages you to do more.



## Healthy Fats Can Slow Prostate Cancer

A combination of fish oil and healthy dietary fats may slow growth of prostate cancer, according to a new study led by the Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of California Los Angeles.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, the improvement may be significant enough to reduce the need for aggressive treatment.

The study included 100 men with early-stage prostate cancer who chose active surveillance rather than immediate treatment. Active surveillance is an option for low-risk prostate cancer cases. About half of such cases eventually progress to a point where either surgery or radiation is recommended.

In the study, half the men were given dietary counseling to reduce their intake of inflammatory fats. Top sources of these are seed oils such as corn, canola, soybean,

cottonseed, sunflower, and other refined oils used in chips, cookies, mayonnaise, and other fried or processed foods. This group of men was also instructed to eat foods that contain anti-inflammatory fats, such as salmon and olive oil, and to take fish oil supplements. The other half of the men continued to eat their usual diet and did not take fish oil.

At the start and end of the one-year study, researchers obtained small tissue samples and performed lab tests that detect how fast cancer cells are multiplying. The faster that cancer cells multiply, the higher the odds that aggressive treatment will be needed in the future.

By the end of the study, tests showed that those eating a healthy diet and taking fish oil had less cancer progression, while cancer progression had increased among those eating their usual diet.

### The Bottom Line

The fact that an inflammatory diet promotes cancer is not news. Nor is the fact that fish oil reduces inflammation. I cover how this works for cancer and other health conditions in earlier newsletters, such as Volume 7, Issue 9, *The Anti-Cancer Lifestyle: Prevention News*, and Volume 4, Issue 4, *How to Calm Harmful Inflammation*.

What I like about the new study is that it makes an important point: If you want to reduce harmful inflammation, it isn't enough to just take a supplement. You also need to replace inflammatory foods — especially those that contain the refined oils I mentioned above — with anti-inflammatory foods.

Many of my patients and readers have experienced dramatic health improvements by making such changes in their diets.

1 Aronson, W.J., et al. "High Omega-3, Low Omega-6 Diet With Fish Oil for Men With Prostate Cancer on Active Surveillance: The CAPFISH-3 Randomized Clinical Trial." *J Clin Oncol*. 2024 Dec 13;JCO2400608. doi: 10.1200/JCO.24.00608. Online ahead of print.



# Beware of False Blood Pressure Readings

Although there are specific guidelines for how to measure blood pressure, these aren't always followed in medical settings. Incorrect arm position is a common mistake, and it can produce a falsely high reading, according to a recent study at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.<sup>1</sup>

For a correct blood-pressure test, your arm should be supported on a desk or table. To find how much of a difference other — incorrect — arm positions can make, researchers compared different readings in a group of 133 adults between the ages of 18 and 80.

Compared to correctly measured blood pressure, here's what they found:

- When participants rested their hand in their lap, systolic blood pressure (the top number) was falsely high by 2.5 to 5.2 mm Hg and diastolic blood pressure (the bottom number) was falsely high by 3.1 to 5.0 mm Hg.
- When participants rested their arm by their side, unsupported, systolic blood pressure was falsely high by 5.1 to 7.9 mm Hg and diastolic blood pressure was falsely high by 3.4 to 5.4 mm Hg.

These exaggerated measurements may mean the difference between a diagnosis of high blood pressure — and treatment for hypertension — or not.

## What To Do

The American Heart Association recommends checking your blood pressure at home, at the same time each day. If you get it checked only at the doctor's office, "white coat hypertension" can produce falsely high readings.

Blood pressure fluctuates. To get a good sense of your level, take two readings in the morning and two readings in the evening and keep a record of the day, time, and each reading. Do this for one week and share the results with your doctor, if needed.

To get accurate readings, make sure that the cuff is not too small or too big. And follow these steps:

- Sit in a chair that supports your back.
- The bottom of the cuff should be right above the bend of your elbow.
- Your feet should be flat on the floor.
- Before starting the test, sit and relax for a minute or two. You shouldn't feel rushed.
- Don't talk, read, or look at a cellphone or other screen.
- Make sure your bladder is empty. A full bladder can raise your blood pressure.
- Don't consume caffeine, salt, alcohol, or tobacco before the test.
- Be aware that stress or taking an over-the-counter pain reliever or decongestant can raise your blood pressure.



## 80% of Strokes Are Preventable

The latest research shows that up to 80 percent of first strokes are preventable. And new medical guidelines are recommending a number of key steps.<sup>2</sup> These help to prevent heart disease as well.

Eating a diet of whole, rather than processed foods, including

healthy fats from plants such as olive oil and nuts, and getting regular exercise are two basic steps. But there's a new emphasis on one other way to reduce stroke risk: avoiding long periods of sitting.

In fact, the guidelines recommend that health screenings include

a check for long periods of sitting, as this has become established as a major risk factor, even for those who regularly do aerobic and resistance exercise at other times of day.

Other preventive steps include not smoking; controlling blood sugar, blood pressure, weight, type 2 diabetes, and unhealthy blood fats; and getting enough sleep.

<sup>1</sup> Liu, H., et al. "Arm Position and Blood Pressure Readings: The ARMS Crossover Randomized Clinical Trial." *JAMA Intern Med.* 2024 Dec 1;184(12):1436-1442. <sup>2</sup> Bushnell, C., et al. "2024 Guideline for the Primary Prevention of Stroke: A Guideline From the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association." *Stroke.* 2024 Dec;55(12):e344-e424.

# Coffee: A Healthy Drink?

Coffee is one of our most popular drinks, outranked only by bottled water and soda. And studies have revealed a variety of health benefits, including lower risk for type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and dementia. Does this mean that everyone should drink coffee every day?

The answer partially depends on individual reactions — some people don't tolerate caffeine — and partially on what else goes into the cup. Added sugars, whether in syrups, creamers, or table sugar, are not beneficial. Nor are the chemical additives found in many creamers.

Coffee drinks with large amounts of milk, such as lattes, can be problematic for those sensitive to dairy. And the lactose in milk is a natural sugar, so the milk is a source of carbs that need to be tracked and limited — even if sugar isn't added to the drink. Plant milks may contain chemical additives and can also be high in carbs.

In coffee shops, blended coffee drinks can contain 40 grams (the equivalent of 10 teaspoons) of sugar. And sugar content of frozen coffee drinks can be as high as 100 grams (25 teaspoons) or more. If you think I'm exaggerating, check nutritional information provided by companies on their websites. Coffee itself, however, is a different story.

## Coffee Benefits

Although caffeine perks us up, it's no secret that too much can cause jitters and anxiety and keep us up at night. But there's no need to

overdo it because other ingredients in coffee have therapeutic effects — and decaf does, too.

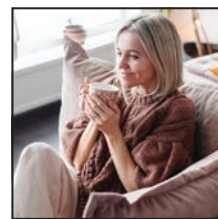
Coffee contains hundreds of plant nutrients. These include some magnesium, potassium, vitamin B3 (niacin), antioxidants, and substances that enhance gut bacteria and help us to metabolize sugar and fat.<sup>1</sup>

Studies show that coffee reduces risks for atherosclerosis, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and Parkinson's disease. And a 7-year study of 6,001 older adults at the University of Michigan found this: Compared to people who drank less than one cup of coffee daily, those who drank two or more cups had 28 percent lower risk of dementia.<sup>2</sup>

One caution: Brew your coffee with a paper filter. Cafestol is a substance in coffee that

can raise cholesterol, but a filter removes it. A French press won't do the trick but the pods in single-cup brewing machines usually do have paper filters.

If you want to drink coffee, I encourage you to try it without a lot of — or any — additives. A light roast will be less bitter than a darker one. If you prefer sweetness, try adding a bit of stevia. Liquid stevia is available in different flavors. And if you like milk or cream, try heavy cream. It contains very little lactose — 1 gram of carbs per tablespoon — and you probably don't need more in an 8-ounce cuppa.



## Caffeine Content

Although individual reactions vary, a healthy caffeine limit for most adults is 400 mg daily — from all sources. These are approximate amounts of caffeine:

Source	Serving size	Caffeine content
Brewed coffee from a coffee shop	12–16 oz	200–360 mg
Americano from a coffee shop	12 oz	150–170 mg
Cold bottled coffee drinks	8–12 oz	75–300 mg
Regular home-brewed coffee	8 oz	92 mg
Instant coffee	8 oz	63 mg
Espresso	1 oz	63–150 mg
Decaffeinated coffee	8 oz	2–15 mg
Black tea	8 oz	47 mg
Green tea	8 oz	28 mg
Cola-style soft drinks	12 oz	32 mg
Energy drinks	8.5 oz	41–246 mg

For caffeine content of other beverages, desserts, snacks, drugs, and supplements, visit the nonprofit Center for Science in the Public Interest at <https://www.cspinet.org/caffeine-chart>.

1 Van Dam, R.M., et al. "Coffee, Caffeine, and Health." *N Engl J Med*. 2020 Jul 23;383(4):369-378. 2 Yan M, et al "Association of coffee and tea intake with long-term risk of dementia: a prospective study" *Alzheimer's Association International Conference 2024*; poster 16238.

# Is your memory getting worse?

If you're over 50, chances are your brain isn't functioning like it did in your younger years.

This isn't surprising. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control warns that over 16 million Americans now live with cognitive impairment. This includes not only memory problems, but also difficulty in learning new things, concentrating, and making important decisions.

Unfortunately, age is the greatest risk factor for cognitive impairment. By age 65, 40% of folks in the U.S. have age-associated memory issues. So as the years go by, it wouldn't be unusual for you to forget things. Or notice how difficult it is to stay focused during a conversation or TV program.

But I have good news. It doesn't have to be that way...

Primal Labs is proud to introduce **CogniForce**, a ground-breaking nutritional supplement for optimal brain support.

**CogniForce** is an easy-to-swallow gel cap containing 10 powerful nutrients to help you improve cognitive function, memory, and brain health:

- ✓ **Ginkgo:** Improves blood flow to the brain. This supports memory, mood, and focus — and exerts a positive effect on the brain's processing speed to help avoid "senior moments."
- ✓ **L-theanine:** This amino acid stimulates brain neurotransmitters to boost concentration and mood — and promote relaxation.
- ✓ **Acetyl-L-carnitine:** Research shows this amino acid can significantly improve memory and focus — and lift you out of those occasional "blue moods."
- ✓ **The B vitamins riboflavin, vitamin B6, folate, and B12:** Studies show these crucial vitamins help prevent the brain shrinkage many people experience as they grow older.
- ✓ **Sensoril®:** This patented extract of the ancient Ayurvedic herb ashwagandha helps lower cortisol — the stress hormone.

✓ **L-tyrosine:** Another amino acid crucial for production of brain neurotransmitters involved in memory and cognition.

✓ **Bioperine®:** Patented extract of black pepper fruit helps improve absorption of nutrients.

Today, people from all walks of life are protecting their brains with **CogniForce**. Here's what a few of them had to say:

"I have been taking **CogniForce** for about 5 weeks now. I noticed a positive result fairly early. I am feeling more alert and better able to handle tedious work that used to overwhelm me."

— Lee Miller from Austin, TX

"I started taking **CogniForce** fifty-two days ago, and my own forgetfulness has slowed down."

— Hayley Burns from Richmond, VA

"I've been taking **CogniForce** just a little over a month now, and it has helped me improve my thinking and mood swings."

— Barbara Sherwood from Leesburg, FL

If you want to maintain your memory and protect your brain into your 60s, 70s, 80s and beyond... the time to do it is NOW. Join thousands of satisfied users experiencing the brain-boosting effects of **CogniForce**.

We're so confident in the brain and memory-supporting power of **CogniForce**, we offer a 60-day **RISK-FREE** 100% money-back guarantee. You have nothing to lose.

Don't lose your precious memories... get your own bottle of **CogniForce** today — experience life with a sharper, quicker, and more focused brain!



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# Q&A

**Q: I like whole milk, but I don't drink it because my doctor told me to stick to low-fat or non-fat milk, and I don't like the taste of those. You say not to eat low-fat foods. Does this apply to milk? And do you think milk is a healthy drink? — Sarina P.**

**A:** Low-fat and non-fat dairy products have been recommended for years, based on the belief that the saturated fat in dairy foods caused weight gain and heart disease.



This proved to be a false premise, but it led to the promotion of many non-fat and low-fat foods, including dairy products. Huge advertising campaigns convinced Americans that these are healthier than foods with their natural fat.

As a result of this low-fat craze, Americans gained weight and type 2 diabetes skyrocketed. Why? Because the fat in these foods was replaced by much more starch and sugar in the American diet — an enormous excess of carbs.

The carb excess initially triggers elevated levels of insulin. High insulin is inflammatory, causes fat storage, and prevents fat burning. After a while, blood sugar becomes elevated, paving the road to type 2 diabetes.

In short, a low-fat or non-fat approach to eating — including dairy products with reduced or no fat — has made America more

overweight, obese, and sick.

It may be hard to believe, but there was scientific evidence all along that too much sugar, not too much saturated fat, was the big dietary trigger of unhealthy changes that increase risk for heart disease, weight gain, type 2 diabetes, and inflammatory diseases.

More and more research has shown that too much sugar and starch, rather than saturated fat, is a health hazard. And studies have shown that full-fat dairy products do not increase risk for heart disease or diabetes.

Unfortunately, doctors are typically not trained in nutrition and are not kept up to date on nutritional research. Hopefully, future dietary guidelines will reflect the latest science, and that data will reach more doctors.

Meanwhile, there are two things to keep in mind about milk. First, with or without fat, plain milk contains the same amount of carbs, in the form of lactose, a natural sugar, which you need to track as part of the carbs in your diet. But non-fat milk is often flavored to improve its taste, and this can double the carbs in it. Second, some people can't digest milk well and should avoid it for that reason.

If you like whole milk, go ahead and enjoy it — just remember to count the carbs.

**Q: A friend of mine lost weight and has kept it off with intermittent fasting. She eats only two meals a day and no snacks. Is this a good idea? — Ernesto J.**

**A:** Intermittent fasting can work for some people. For others, it can

disrupt thyroid and other hormones and slow metabolism. Most people need to eat more often to keep their blood sugar and energy stable, and to avoid cravings, brain fog, and feeling irritable between meals.

For most Americans, the excessive carbs in today's typical diets have disrupted normal metabolism. Consequently, their blood sugar spikes dramatically after eating and then dips too low, making it difficult to control an appetite for starchy and sugary foods, especially snacks.

To stabilize blood sugar, appetite, and energy, I've found that most people need to eat approximately every three hours — three meals and snacks in between — and follow a low-carb diet. Breakfast is especially important to set up stable blood sugar for the day.

Once someone's blood sugar is stabilized, they may do well while eating less often.

There's no one-size-fits-all diet. It's important to follow an eating plan that works for you.

## 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.