



CONTENTS

The Worst Ingredients—
Avoid Them.....2

How Do I Find Time
To Eat a Healthy Diet?2

What About
Organic Food?.....3

Should I Count Carbs
if My Blood Sugar Is
Normal?.....4

Must I Exercise?4

How Soon Will I
See Results?5

Can I Cheat?.....5

Keeping Your Heart
Healthy8

Virus Alert.....10

The Power of Being Fit....11

Heartburn Drugs and
Magnesium11

How To Read Fish Oil
Labels12



Answers to Your
Top Questions



We’ve been bombarded with so much information about what is or isn’t a healthy diet, it’s mind-boggling — and it’s easy to get confused. Here are some answers to set the record straight.

In the years that I’ve been working with patients and hearing from my readers, there are certain questions that I often get asked. In this issue I’m answering the ones I’ve been asked most frequently.

Before I address specific questions about diet, I want to discuss something that many people struggle with today: How to adopt and stick with a healthy diet. I know that some of you have been eating a healthy low-carb diet of whole foods for a long time. But for others — most Americans — that’s difficult to do.

Cooking meals from scratch can be challenging, despite the endless recipes available online. Most packaged foods, while convenient, undergo industrial processing that reduces nutrients that are naturally present and adds an array of food additives that aren’t nutritious and contribute to poor health.

I’m all for being practical, so I suggest a good, better, best approach. Rather than trying to suddenly adopt

a perfect diet that seems unrealistic, aim for step-by-step improvements that can become part of your usual habits.

For example, any type of guacamole on some celery is a good, satisfying snack. It certainly beats pretzels or similar snack foods that are high in carbs and easy to overeat. However, store-bought guacamole can contain chemical preservatives, flavoring, and other additives that you wouldn’t find in a homemade version. Ready-made guacamole without such additives is better, if you can find it in your area. The best would be your own homemade guacamole, which would be freshest and likely tastiest and most nutritious.

If guacamole is a food you enjoy, I encourage you to find a recipe you like and make it at home. It isn’t difficult to mash up an avocado and

**IN THE NEXT ISSUE:
Peripheral Neuropathy:
Causes and Remedies**

add lime juice and seasonings. If that isn't always practical, make the effort to read labels on different guacamole products in your local stores and find one without chemical food additives or ingredients that you wouldn't find in a traditional home kitchen.

The types of food additives to avoid are those used in “ultra-processed” foods. These are foods designed to have a long shelf life and to be so appealing to your taste buds that they are addictive — which is why you can't eat just one chip.

Ultra-processed foods contain ingredients that don't resemble foods as they appear in nature. Because our digestive system can't

utilize these in the same way as real foods, they can disrupt the balance of microorganisms in our gut.¹ Research shows that this can cause harmful inflammation and contribute to risk for type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure.² In addition, because the gut and brain are connected, disruption of gut microorganisms, including reduction of beneficial bacteria, can lead to anxiety and worsened mental function and mood.³

Studies with a total of more than nine million people have found that the more ultra-processed food in a diet, the higher the odds of type 2 diabetes, anxiety, depression, heart disease,

other ills, and even earlier death from any cause.⁴

There are thousands of possible ingredients in ultra-processed food — far too many to list. But in the chart below, *The Worst Ingredients — Avoid Them*, I've listed some of the common ones.⁵

Think of real foods as a foundation. If a house doesn't have a strong foundation, pretty furniture or a new paint job won't make the home more stable and resilient to bad weather. Fixing the foundation is the only solution.

How do I find time to eat a healthy diet?

If you are not familiar with my low-carb diet, I encourage you to look at an earlier issue that explains it in detail, listed in *Related to This Topic* on page 6. To give you a brief snapshot, I don't exclude any foods; however, I recommend counting and limiting carbs from specific categories of foods that are the major sources of carb overload in our diets: grains, snack foods, fruit, starchy vegetables and legumes, and drinks that contain natural or added sugar, including sodas, fruit juices, and milk (which contains lactose: milk sugar).

Now, you may be thinking that trying to avoid ultra-processed foods while also trying to count and reduce carbs is just too much to fit into your life. But I'll explain why it isn't as difficult or as time-consuming as you might think.

Many popular foods are both ultra-processed and high in carbs. Breads, buns, cereals, cakes, cookies — mass-produced grain foods — are a major source of both. If you check ingredients and Nutrition Facts on labels, you'll

The Worst Ingredients — Avoid Them

Below are some of the ingredients found in ultra-processed foods. Avoid them as much as possible.

• Acacia Gum	• Hydrogenated oil
• Additives that are “anti-caking”	• Hydrolyzed protein
• Agar-Agar	• Invert sugar
• Artificial flavors	• Locust Bean Gum (Carob Bean Gum)
• Carob Bean Gum	• Maltodextrin
• Carrageenan	• Mannitol
• Cellulose	• Modified (fill-in-the-blank) Starch
• Cellulose Gum (Carboxymethylcellulose)	• Mono- and diglycerides
• Dextrose	• Polysorbate 60 and 80
• Dyes and artificial colors	• Sorbitol
• Gellan Gum	• Soy protein isolate
• High-Fructose Corn Syrup	• Sucralose
	• Titanium Dioxide

Popular sources of these types of ingredients include sodas, snacks, baked goods, desserts, energy or protein bars, flavored yogurts, and heat-and-eat dishes such as pizza, pasta, chicken nuggets, sausages, hot dogs, and instant soups or sauces.

Not all convenient packaged or prepared foods contain ingredients from this list, but the majority do. Keep in mind that when you eat ultra-processed foods, you are missing out on the benefits of real foods you could be eating instead.



see what I mean. But this doesn't hold true for every grain product.

Traditional baking recipes don't contain chemical additives, and some companies still follow these. But most of the baked goods on supermarket shelves are mass produced and do contain a variety of additives such as those on the list on page 2.

Snack foods are in another category that is both high in carbs and ultra-processed ingredients. Many types of chips and other crunchy snacks, pretzels, popcorn, and candy are some examples. French fries from most fast-food companies or frozen fries you heat at home are also likely to contain ultra-processed ingredients, and they are naturally high in carbs.

Trying to deal with all this may seem overwhelming. But there's a simple, efficient way to gradually upgrade your diet.

Tackle One Food at a Time

We all have certain staples on our everyday menus. Make a list of those and check the ingredients and carbs in any that aren't fresh meat, fish, or vegetables.

For foods that are ultra-processed and carb-heavy, look for alternatives without the industrial ingredients, or think of a practical way to replace them with whole foods. Do this with one food at a time. (If you don't like to make lists, just pick one of your staples.)

As an example, if you often have a side dish of ultra-processed potato, rice, or pasta, you could replace it with one or more non-starchy vegetables such as spinach, different colored bell peppers, broccoli, or others. They can be roasted, steamed, or microwaved

with some extra virgin olive oil and seasoning.

Other options include a side dish of riced cauliflower and some butter and seasoning. The cauliflower can also be mashed. Zucchini "noodles," spiralized zucchini that looks like spaghetti, is available in many stores. Try it with a canned or jarred tomato sauce that doesn't contain ultra-processed ingredients. (You can also get a spiralizer and make your own zucchini noodles.)

When you tackle a food, look for an alternative that appeals to you and isn't ultra-processed. Yes, you will need to read food labels of different products, but you need do it only once for each food. Then, you have a healthier item in your usual diet.

Keep replacing only one food at a time, until eating the healthier alternative becomes part of your usual routine and you don't really have to think about it. Then, pick another food or dish and go through the same process with that one. Do the same with other foods on your list, one by one, and a healthier diet will eventually become second nature.

If your local stores offer limited food choices, shopping online is an option.

Can you shift much more rapidly to a low-carb diet? Of course. It takes a bit of planning and more effort than the gradual approach I just described, but if that's what works for you, then that's the way to go. But if you find it hard to stick with the program, give the gradual approach a try. The important thing is to make changes you can realistically sustain.

What about organic food?

I've occasionally had a reader question or even chastise me for not always telling you to eat organic food. In an ideal world, everything you eat would be organic, but practically speaking, this isn't always possible. The good news is that organic foods are much more available today than they used to be, and although they still cost more than non-organic versions, they are more affordable than in the past.

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

Natural Health Connections is a monthly publication of Primal Health LP.

Disclaimer: This newsletter offers health, medical, fitness, and nutritional information for educational purposes only. **You should not rely on this information as a substitute or a replacement for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.** You should seek the advice of your healthcare provider before undertaking any treatment or if you have any concerns or questions about your health. Do not disregard, avoid, or delay obtaining medical or health-related advice from your healthcare professional because of something you may have read in this newsletter. Nothing stated here is intended to be, and must not be taken to be, the practice of medical, nutritional, physiological, or any professional care. Primal Health, LP and its officers, directors, and trainers disclaim any warranties (expressed or implied), of merchantability, or fitness for any particular purpose, and shall in no event be held liable to any party for any direct, indirect, punitive, special, incidental or other consequential damages arising directly or indirectly from any use of this material, which is provided "as is," and without warranties.



Copyright © 2025 by Primal Health, LP.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher. Photocopying, recording, or using other electronic or mechanical methods to capture any part of this publication, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law, is prohibited. For permission requests, write to the publisher at the address below.

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

So, do I recommend choosing organic foods as much as possible? Yes. But I'm a realist.

Conventionally grown fruits and vegetables are the top sources of pesticides in our diets. A good way to go about reducing your exposure is to buy organic versions of those fruits and vegetables that contain the highest pesticide loads.

Each year, the nonprofit Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org) compiles and publishes a list of The Dirty Dozen: the top 12 types of produce with the most pesticide residues. The ranking is based on USDA tests of produce around the country.

Each time a new list is released, I include it in this newsletter. Based on the most recent data, these are the top 12 fruits and vegetables to buy organic (highest pesticide levels first):

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1. Strawberries | 6. Pears |
| 2. Spinach | 7. Nectarines |
| 3. Kale,
collard, and
mustard
greens | 8. Apples |
| 4. Grapes | 9. Bell and
hot peppers |
| 5. Peaches | 10. Cherries |
| | 11. Blueberries |
| | 12. Green beans |

I'm not saying you should never eat non-organic versions of these. But do try to get organic versions where possible. I'm also not saying that these are the *only* foods you should buy organic. Use your own judgement, based on your own priorities.

Should I count carbs if my blood sugar is normal?

The answer depends on your existing diet and health. Some healthy people eat a diet of mostly whole foods that is significantly lower in

carbs than the typical American diet, but they don't think of it as "low-carb." They are definitely a minority in this country.

One simple way to find out if you need to cut back on carbs is to get your fasting insulin checked. It's a blood test that can be done at the same time as other, routine blood tests at your doctor's office. A healthy level is under 6 mIU/mL (microunits per milliliter).

Fasting insulin is a valuable test that is given to insulin-dependent diabetics. But it should also be used to detect risk for type 2 diabetes much earlier than the usual blood sugar tests. Here's why: When blood sugar initially starts to rise too high, extra insulin is produced to keep it in a normal range. This starts to happen years before a test shows elevated blood sugar.

Elevated insulin is inflammatory, promotes fat storage, and increases risks for obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and earlier death.⁶ It also causes sodium and water retention and can trigger or contribute to high blood pressure.⁷

If no action is taken to curb the need for extra insulin, cells eventually become resistant to the hormone. And then, blood sugar rises. But this is much later in the process. A fasting insulin test can alert you earlier to a problem and give you more time to reverse a harmful internal process.

As an alternative, you could keep a journal of all your meals and snacks for a few days and compare your carb counts to what I recommend. While this won't give you the same data as a fasting insulin test, it will give you some idea of where you stand in terms of carb consumption.

The details of my diet and recommended carb content are in the first issue listed in *Related to This Topic* on page 6.

Must I exercise?

The short answer is a resounding "yes." Exercise is essential for healthy circulation, metabolism, flexibility, immunity, strength, good mental function, and a longer life.⁸

If you are just about to embark on a healthier lifestyle, I suggest making it a priority to eat a healthier diet. But you can also aim to move more in the course of the day.

If you routinely spend long periods sitting, for example, get up and walk around a bit more often — perhaps do a chore around the house. If you usually drive a very short distance to run an errand, consider walking instead.

Don't try to instantly start an ambitious exercise program. For one thing, you need good nutrition to support physical activity. And for another, when I've seen people try to change too many things at once, they often just give up because it's unrealistic.

Once you're on a roll in improving your diet, or if it's already pretty good but you don't exercise, do start. Walking is a simple approach. I recommend varying your pace: Walk fast, so that your heart rate speeds up, for a minute or a block, and then walk at a slower pace for a few minutes or the next couple of blocks. Repeat that for 20 minutes and you'll get more benefit than simply walking at a steady pace for a longer time.

Once you're doing that a few times per week, add strength training. You can do it with exercise bands, weights, or with your body

weight: squats or lunges, push-ups (you can start against a wall), and such. Or find some classes you like, at a local health club or community center, or online.

With patients who weren't exercising, I've seen dramatic drops in blood pressure or blood sugar once they started. Sometimes the change is more subtle, but you can rest assured that any exercise you do will improve your health and enhance the beneficial effects of a healthy diet.

How soon will I see results?

It depends on your starting point and the results you're looking for. If your aim is weight loss, for example, you might see a quick loss of a few pounds when you adopt the low-carb diet I recommend. That's because first you lose excess fluids (a good thing), and then pounds drop off more slowly.

Slow weight loss is good because that way you lose less muscle and it's more realistic to keep the weight off. How long it will take you to reach your goal depends on how much weight you're aiming to lose.

If you reduce carbs the way I recommend, blood sugar or blood pressure can sometimes start to drop in a few days, but this doesn't always happen. You should see levels start to improve within a couple of weeks. Notice I said "start."

Internal damage that leads to elevated blood sugar or blood pressure takes years to develop. While it doesn't take years to improve, it can take three to six months for your body to become significantly healthier. However, you should see changes in markers much sooner.

Do check your readings every

few days. For blood sugar, a continuous glucose monitor is the best way to track how your food, physical activity, sleep, and life situations are affecting your levels. I cover this in more detail in an earlier issue, listed in *Related to This Topic* on page 6.

Can I cheat?

I wouldn't. Here's why: When you start following my low-carb eating approach, you're reversing years of damage. You may quickly feel better and see improved health markers, but it takes longer for internal functions to reach a new, healthier state that's stable. If you cheat, you may lose the progress you've made and basically need to start over.

Here's an analogy: Let's say someone breaks their arm. They wear a cast to enable the bone to heal. After a while, they get a brace and are told to avoid putting pressure on it, as the bone is not

strong enough to withstand stress. If they put too much pressure on the arm, the bone can break again.

Internally, we don't see the "broken bone," but healing follows a similar process. There is a difference, though. Internally, the metabolic damage won't be reversed to the way it functioned when you were young and could eat anything with no problems. But it will get a lot better.

Once your internal health has significantly improved, you may be able to tolerate an occasional treat without creating a new problem. But you have to be realistic and pay attention to your own threshold.

For example, some people can tolerate a small piece of cake, once in a rare while. Others can't stop eating cake once they start, and that creates a setback. Then again, taste buds change with a healthy diet, as your body becomes accustomed to real food, and not

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.



everyone wants the same sugary, starchy foods they used to crave.

Why do my readings fluctuate?

If you’re lowering blood sugar or blood pressure by consistently eating a healthy low-carb diet but then your levels start to fluctuate, there could be a few different reasons for this.

Blood sugar can fluctuate during the day or from one day to another because of:

- Skipping meals, going too long between meals and snacks, or suddenly eating different types of foods.
- Changing exercise habits: You don’t usually exercise and suddenly do a workout, or vice

versa, you typically exercise and suddenly miss a workout.

- Sleep changes: You didn’t get enough sleep or were woken up during the night for some unusual reason.
- Stressful events or environments.

Fluctuations in blood sugar can also cause fluctuations in blood pressure. Constipation, physical pain, strokes, concussions, and other neurological injuries can also make blood pressure erratic during the course of a day or from one day to another.

Another stress-related manifestation that can occur with blood sugar and blood pressure is this: If you notice levels run higher during the work week but drop on weekends or

when you take a vacation, then there’s a higher level of mental or physical stress at work. The same could happen with other environments you visit.

Physical stress could stem from exposure to some type of toxin in the building. Toxins could be emitted by work equipment or other sources, such as mold.

In such situations, tracking changes in your diet and routines and comparing those with fluctuating markers can help you to identify triggers.

A Final Word

Most of the food in our environment is not designed to enhance our health and can make it difficult to eat a wholesome diet. But it gets easier once you find healthy versions of your personal favorites. And it’s always a good idea to try out some new recipes, made from scratch.


Investing some effort to eat a variety of nutritious foods pays big rewards. It lays the foundation for a healthier and happier life.

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
Toxins in Food	1	7	The 21-Day Energy Restoration Plan
Getting off Drugs	7	12	Herbal Supplements: How to Get the Full Benefits (see page 3)
Sleep	2	2	The 10-Minute Sleep Solution
Exercise	1	7	The Secret to Effective Aerobic Exercise (page 7)
Continuous Glucose Monitors	7	10	Technology for Managing Blood Sugar (page 9)
Blood Pressure	6	5	Blood Pressure Control: What Matters Most
Diabetes	5	2	How to Use Supplements to Prevent and Reverse Type 2 Diabetes

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



1 Brichacek, A.L., et al. "Ultra-Processed Foods: A Narrative Review of the Impact on the Human Gut Microbiome and Variations in Classification Methods." *Nutrients*. 2024 Jun 1;16(11):1738.

2 Atzeni, A., et al. "Association between ultra-processed food consumption and gut microbiota in senior subjects with overweight/obesity and metabolic syndrome." *Front Nutr*. 2022 Oct 10;9:976547.

3 Song, Z., et al. "Effects of ultra-processed foods on the microbiota-gut-brain axis: The bread-and-butter issue." *Food Res Int*. 2023 May;167:112730.

4 Lane, M.M., et al. "Ultra-processed food exposure and adverse health outcomes: umbrella review of epidemiological meta-analyses." *BMJ*. 2024 Feb 28;384:e077310. doi: 10.1136/bmj-2023-077310.

5 Monteiro, C.A., et al. NOVA. "The star shines bright. [Food classification. Public health]" *World Nutrition*. 2016 Jan-Mar ;7(1-3):28-38.

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

7 Brosolo, G., et al. "Insulin Resistance and High Blood Pressure: Mechanistic Insight on the Role of the Kidney." *Biomedicines*. 2022 Sep 23;10(10):2374.

8 Qui, Y., et al. "Exercise sustains the hallmarks of health." *J Sport Health Sci*. 2023 Jan;12(1):8-35.

Micronutrient rejuvenates stiff joints in just 7 days



If your knees, hips or joints are aching, chances are good it's due to too much inflammation.

Now, you can get rapid relief with a unique, highly targeted form of **Boron** called FruiteX-B®. This patented ingredient is nature-identical to the boron found in fruits, vegetables and certain beans.



Now, get better relief than from glucosamine and chondroitin.

In double blind clinical study, 60 people with knee discomfort got 220 mg of FruiteX-B® boron or a placebo daily for 14 days.

The results? Those taking the unique Boron got relief in as little as 7 days, with less joint discomfort, reduced stiffness and improved flexibility, mobility and range of motion.¹²

Why such soothing comfort?

Because this special form of boron supports a normal inflammatory response by reducing the inflammation marker, C-reactive protein.

Now, this same clinically-tested dosage of FruiteX-B® is yours in the powerful **TriFlexarin**® formula.

Plus, this unique formula includes a patented

collagen ingredient called **UC-II® collagen**, which has been shown to “reprogram” a faulty immune response that can cause activity-related joint pain.

In one study, people suffering from moderate to severe pain due to exercise took 40 mg of UC-II collagen or 1500 mg of glucosamine and 1200 mg of chondroitin. Overall, people taking UC-II improved on the WOMAC pain scale by 39% which was 19% better than glucosamine-chondroitin.¹³

In another study, healthy people taking UC-II were able to exercise longer before experiencing pain than the placebo group and significantly improved range of motion.¹⁴

TriFlexarin® also includes selenium to reduce joint tenderness and a blend of ginger, turmeric and boswellia serrata to reduce occasional joint swelling and inflammation.

“**TriFlexarin**® is great. You feel relief quickly after taking it. I highly recommend it.”

—Georgianna



“I had pain at the gym, pain while sitting, pain while sleeping. **TriFlexarin**® works for me. The other night I was out to dinner and realized I was pain-free.”

—J. Sanders, CA



Soothe and rejuvenate your stiff joints in just 7 days—get your bottle of **TriFlexarin**® today!

Order Your Bottle Today!

TriFlexarin.com

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

Keeping Your Heart Healthy

February is American Heart Month, designed to promote heart health and help raise awareness of how to prevent heart disease, which continues to be our top killer. So, I want to mention some key facts that may not be emphasized or mentioned as much as they should be.

The Effect of Type 2 Diabetes

I'm guessing you know that type 2 diabetes raises risk for heart disease. High blood sugar damages blood vessels and nerves that control your heart function, and the effect is huge:¹

- Diabetes multiplies risk for heart disease between two and four times. The less the disease is controlled, the more the risk increases.
- Diabetes is associated with 75-percent higher risk for premature death, especially from heart disease.
- Prediabetes — blood sugar that is elevated but not high enough to be classified as diabetes — also damages blood vessels. A review of studies with more than 10 million people found that prediabetes can raise risk for heart disease and premature death by more than 30 percent.²

What a Low-Carb Diet Can Do

The good news is that a low-carb diet can not only help to get blood sugar in a healthy range but it can also improve the traditional markers used to assess risk for heart disease.

An analysis of studies with 1,394 people looked at the effects of a low-carb diet on obesity and type 2 diabetes. It found that such a diet improved the function of insulin and lowered blood sugar.

In addition, a low-carb diet reduced excess body fat; lowered blood pressure, “bad” LDL cholesterol, and triglycerides; and increased “good” HDL cholesterol.³

One thing I want to clarify: Plant-based diets are routinely recommended for heart health. The way of eating I recommend doesn't conflict with this because my diet includes plenty of plant foods.

I don't exclude animal foods. For more details about

the healthiest types of meat, I encourage you to look at an earlier issue on the topic, listed in *Related to This Topic* on page 6.



Valuable Markers of Heart Health

There are a couple of tests I recommend considering. These aren't routinely done, but if you want to be on top of your heart health, they are of value in detecting malfunctions that may otherwise be overlooked. And early detection can motivate you to make diet and lifestyle changes for better health.

Coronary Artery Calcium Scan: This is a special type of CT scan that measures calcium deposits (plaque) in arteries. Sometimes it's called a coronary calcium CT scan or a “heart scan.” The results are referred to as a “coronary calcium score.”

If your score is zero, you don't need to retest. If your score is higher, retest in 12 to 18 months. You could see improvement, worsening, or no change. No change means the calcium deposits are stable and risk is very low. But a score increase of more than 14 percent is a sign of higher risk for a heart attack and stroke.

Ask your doctor for the test. It isn't usually covered by insurance for prevention, but can be covered if your doctor sees a medical reason for it. If you have to pay out of pocket, check prices in your area. Nationally, costs can range from \$100 to \$400.

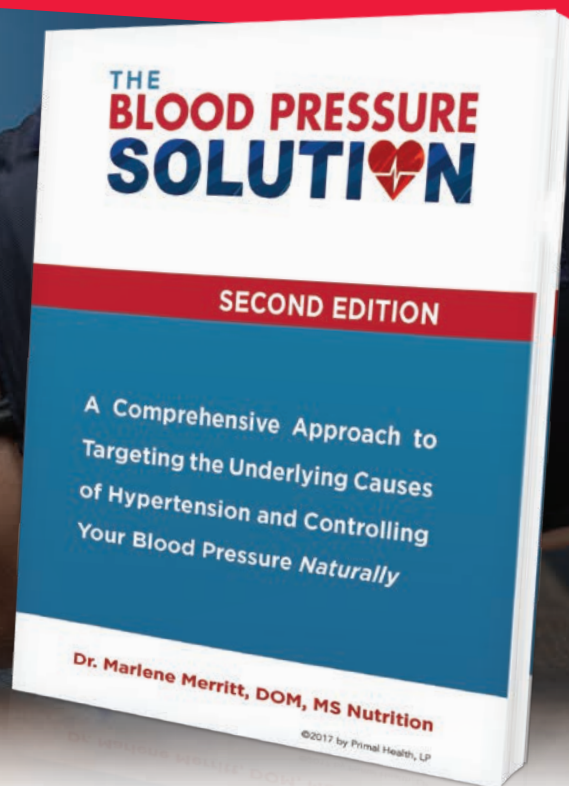
Exercise Stress Test (VO₂max test): The “V” stands for volume, “O₂” for oxygen, and “max” for maximum. The test measures the maximum amount of oxygen you can take in and use while doing intense exercise. It's a valuable marker of your cardiovascular fitness.

In doing the test, you exercise on a treadmill or stationary bike while wearing a heart rate monitor and an oxygen mask. The higher your score, the better your heart and lungs are working.

Ask your doctor for the test — insurance may cover it. If not, it generally costs around \$100.

1 Dal Canto, E., et al. “Diabetes as a cardiovascular risk factor: An overview of global trends of macro and micro vascular complications.” *Eur J Prev Cardiol.* 2019 Dec;26(2_suppl):25-32. 2 Cai, X., et al. “Association between prediabetes and risk of all cause mortality and cardiovascular disease: updated meta-analysis.” *BMJ.* 2020 Jul 15;370:m2297. 3 Pavlidou, E., et al. “Clinical Evidence of Low-Carbohydrate Diets against Obesity and Diabetes Mellitus.” *Metabolites.* 2023 Feb 6;13(2):240.

Get Dr. Marlene's Best-Selling Book... **Blood Pressure Solution!**



Dr. Marlene has been sounding the alarm about dangerous blood pressure drugs for the last 15 years — and offering a safe, natural alternative.

She has worked with hundreds of patients who were suffering high blood pressure—many were taking two, three, even four medications and going through awful side effects...

Just like Kathleen Kelly, whose ankles swelled up from the prescription blood pressure drugs she was taking. She also suffered an awful cough from using Lisinopril. By the time she read Dr. Marlene's best-selling book, **Blood Pressure Solution**, Kathleen's doctor had her on three blood pressure medicines combined—and her blood pressure was still high!

"My patients are always surprised to see how easy it is to use my natural Blood Pressure Solution," said Dr. Marlene. "The diet is not restrictive. Many of the foods you thought were taboo are perfectly ok—like steak is ok, butter is ok, natural sea salt is ok, even several carb foods are good. Part of the solution is to get good fats into your diet."

After reading **Blood Pressure Solution**, Kathleen made simple lifestyle changes found in the book and began to see immediate results...

"My blood pressure came down right away...I just feel great. I'm ecstatic. I go around telling everybody I found the fountain of youth. I have much more energy now. My concentration and focus are better. I can walk around my block without getting winded anymore. I am 100% off my medication."

Did you see that? Kathleen reports she is 100% off her medications. And so can you!

Yes! You too can be off these anti-hypertensive drugs... maintain blood pressure in the normal range... and feel good again!

Dr. Marlene Merritt's **Blood Pressure Solution** is working for people all across America. And she believes it can work for you, too. Here's how...

Dr. Marlene originally developed her unique solution for her patients at the Merritt Wellness Center in Austin, Texas. And after seeing just how successful it was for people in her own community—she decided to put her entire natural solution, with step-by-step guidance, into an easy-to-use book called, **Blood Pressure Solution**.

This is a comprehensive approach to targeting the underlying causes of hypertension and controlling your blood pressure naturally.

Dr. Marlene's book has been sweeping the country with over 330,000 copies sold in the U.S., and even 32,000 copies shipped overseas.

So, are you ready to bring your blood pressure back to the normal range? Gain more energy? Drop a few unwanted pounds? And feel better than you have in years, just as Kathleen did?

Great! Get your copy of Dr. Marlene's best-selling book, **Blood Pressure Solution** today! Go to the website listed below, and you'll see a complete review of the book, watch videos from people just like Kathleen and order your copy of **Blood Pressure Solution**!

Get Your Copy Today! Go To:
www.PrimalLabs.com/BPS

Virus Alert

You may well know that a few viruses are around this winter: cold, flu, RSV, COVID, and norovirus. But bird flu is another one that I want you to be aware of. We don't yet know how much risk it poses, but I recommend taking precautions.

As its name suggests, bird flu originated in wild birds and has killed millions of chickens. It has also mutated and infected thousands of dairy cows, but that's not all.

As we go to press, at least 67 cases of bird flu in humans have been confirmed. That may not sound dangerous. However, this number underestimates how many people have been infected (and the statistics may be different by the time you read this).

Most of the reported human cases of bird flu have been in workers on dairy farms, most of whom can't afford to take time off to see a doctor and don't have health insurance. And testing for bird flu is so scarce that tracking of infections has been almost nonexistent. What little data we do have is not encouraging.

What We Know

In one study, CDC researchers tested a group of 115 workers on dairy farms in Michigan and Colorado. Blood tests showed that among these, eight had been infected with bird flu.¹

Eight people doesn't sound like much, but let's look at it in context: It's 7 percent of those tested. There are thousands of other workers who have the same exposure to sick dairy cows. Seven percent is one out of 14 people; that's a lot.

Another study, led by University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, tested 14 workers from two farms in Texas. Two workers showed prior infection with bird flu. That's 15 percent of the workers tested.² We know that there have been bird flu outbreaks in cows on more than 170 dairy farms in 13 states — but no one has been counting infected people.

One death has been reported as we go to press. A man in Louisiana was infected by chickens in his backyard; they had been infected by wild birds.

Researchers in Texas found that the virus mutated after infecting humans. So far (at time of press), there have not been any reports of human-to-human trans-

mission. But the risk of such transmission increases as the virus mutates.

Antiviral drugs that we already have are effective in treating bird flu in humans.

However, with any new virus that humans have not been widely exposed to, there is a big unknown: How serious and widespread can it become? We do know that our immune systems have not developed defenses yet.

Vaccines can help us develop defenses without getting sick. And work is being done to develop a bird flu vaccine. But it will take some time for such a vaccine to be developed and proven to be safe and protective.

What You Can Do

First, take precautions against any virus: Wash your hands often, with soap, for as long as it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song twice. When you're out and about, use hand sanitizer after you shop in a store or go anywhere else where you're touching things. Viruses can be transmitted by droplets, which can land on surfaces you touch. They can also be airborne. Steer clear of sick people, and if you must be in their proximity, wear a mask.

And to shore up your immune system — your internal defenses — get your essential nutrients. Take a multi with around 100 percent of the Daily Value of most nutrients, including zinc and other minerals, as well as 125 mcg (5,000 IU) of vitamin D daily and vitamin K2 to make sure the vitamin is utilized properly.

I don't recommend taking megadoses of individual nutrients for prevention. However, if you do get sick, zinc lozenges can help. Zinc gets used up very quickly when there's an infection.

In addition, take one serving of echinacea daily for prevention. It takes a few weeks to build up in your system to have the most beneficial effect. A tincture should make your tongue tingle; if not, it isn't active and you should get a new one. If you take an echinacea capsule, break one open to see if the contents make your tongue tingle. And be sure to get enough sleep.

All this helps your immune system to protect you from infection and, should you get sick, to recover more quickly.



¹ Mellis, A.M., et al. "Serologic Evidence of Recent Infection with Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A(H5) Virus Among Dairy Workers — Michigan and Colorado, June–August 2024." *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2024 Nov 7;73(44):1004-1009. ² Shittu, I., et al. "A One Health Investigation into H5N1 Avian Influenza Virus Epizootics on Two Dairy Farms." *Clin Infect Dis.* 2024 Dec 10;ciae576.

The Power of Being Fit

Excess weight can certainly lead to health problems, especially if excess body fat surrounds internal organs around your middle. That fat is inflammatory and contributes to diabetes, high blood pressure, and other ills. But being fit can lead to a longer life, even with excess weight.

A recent study — the largest of its kind — took a closer look at the relationship of body weight, aerobic fitness, heart disease, and death. And it concluded that people who are overweight or obese but aerobically fit will likely live longer than their slim counterparts who are out of shape.¹

The new research was done by a team from universities in the United States and the United Kingdom. The group analyzed earlier studies with a total of nearly 400,000 peo-

ple. Participants in some of these studies had prediabetes, diabetes, or heart disease.

Body mass index (BMI) was used to classify weight as normal, overweight, or obese, and fitness was measured with an exercise stress test (described on page 8).

The study concluded:

- Compared to fit people of normal weight, those who were fit and overweight or obese didn't have a significantly higher risk of death from heart disease or other causes.
- Unfit people in all weight categories were two-to-three times more likely to die sooner than fit people with a normal weight.

Encouraging as this is, it doesn't mean that excess weight, especially internal fat around the



abdominal area, doesn't increase risk for diabetes. And excess weight can add stress to joints, contribute to arthritis, and make it difficult to do aerobic exercise.

The important take-home message from this is that regardless of your weight, fitness can enhance your health and extend your life. And even if you aren't overweight, not being fit increases your health risks.

Yes, regular exercise that is intense enough to raise your fitness level requires some effort. But aerobic fitness reaps big rewards, and for anyone who is obese, it can delay diabetes and heart disease.

Heartburn Drugs and Magnesium

A 64-year-old man in Japan went to a hospital with dizziness, nausea, loss of appetite, and trouble moving. As he was being examined, he started to have convulsions. It turned out that the underlying trigger of these symptoms was a severe magnesium deficiency as a result of taking a heartburn drug — a proton pump inhibitor — for 12 years.²

Long-term use of these drugs is known to deplete magnesium because the drugs interfere with its absorption, and the FDA requires that drug labels carry warnings to this effect. In the case of the man's severe deficiency, the heartburn drugs were discontinued but it took three weeks of intravenous magnesium to restore normal levels of the mineral.

Some commonly used proton pump inhibitors include

Nexium, Prilosec, and Prevacid.

They reduce acid levels in the stomach, which interferes with normal breakdown of vitamins and minerals. Other nutrients that can become depleted by such drugs include vitamin B12, vitamin C, calcium, and iron.³

Similar depletions can occur because stomach acid is low without the use of PPIs. As we get older, levels of stomach acid tend to decrease. Contrary to popular thinking, this can disrupt normal digestion and cause food to regurgitate up the esophagus: the tube down which food travels to the stomach. And that causes heartburn. I describe this mechanism, and the remedy, in detail in an earlier issue of this newsletter: Volume 1, Issue 6: *The 6-Minute Heartburn Remedy*.



1 Weeldreyer, N.R., et al. "Cardiorespiratory fitness, body mass index and mortality: a systematic review and meta-analysis." *Br J Sports Med*. 2024 Nov 13;bjports-2024-108748. 2 Sato, T., et al. "Hypomagnesemia Causing Convulsions in a Patient Taking a Proton Pump Inhibitor: A Case Report." *Cureus*. 2025 Jan 1, 17(1):e76727. doi:10.7759/cureus.76727. 3 Heidelbaugh, J.J. "Proton pump inhibitors and risk of vitamin and mineral deficiency: evidence and clinical implications." *Ther Adv Drug Saf*. 2013 Jun;4(3):125-33.

Q&A

Q: I'm confused by EPA, DHA, and omega-3s listed on fish oil labels. Can you explain how to read these labels? — Andrea M.

A: Yes, this can be very confusing. The fish oil in supplements is extracted from oily fish such as herring, mackerel, sardines, anchovies, and others. The oil naturally contains different types of fat but is especially rich in omega-3s, which have been proven to be beneficial.

In other words, some — but not all — of the fat in fish oil is of the omega-3 type. EPA and DHA are two omega-3 fats that have been widely studied and identified as the key beneficial components of fish oil. On labels, they can be listed in different ways.

These are some examples:

- The front of a bottle states that one capsule contains “1,000 mg of fish oil.” The Supplement Facts on the back shows “300 mg of omega-3s” and states these are EPA and DHA. Or it may list separate EPA and DHA amounts that add up to around 300 mg.
- The front label may state that one capsule contains “300 mg omega-3s.”
- The front label states that one capsule contains fish oil “1,000 mg (300 mg omega-3s).”

Here's another thing to be aware of: I've seen some products list 1,000 mg per capsule on the front of a bottle and then, in the

Supplement Facts, list one serving as two capsules. In my example above, two capsules would provide around 600 mg of EPA and DHA.

Between 20 and 30 percent of fish oil naturally consists of omega-3s, notably EPA and DHA. However, some products contain more concentrated amounts — up to 85 percent EPA and DHA.

I recommend taking 1,000 mg daily of the omega-3s (EPA and DHA) in fish oil. With basic fish oil products, like the one I used in my example, that would mean taking 3,000 mg of fish oil (3 capsules) per day. You can skip days when you eat oily fish.

If you don't like taking a lot of pills, consider a concentrated product, sometimes called “extra strength” fish oil. Or you can take a concentrated liquid fish oil.

One important point: To get the full benefits of fish oil, you should eat less inflammatory refined seed oil, such as corn, soy, canola, and cottonseed oils. Omega-3s reduce inflammation. However, if you continue to fuel inflammation with the other oils, the fish oil supplements are working uphill.

Q: Can you really reverse type 2 diabetes? Or is it just prediabetes that's reversible? — Mo B.

A: As you might expect, prediabetes is easier to reverse. In prediabetes, the problem is insulin resistance: Cells are not responding to insulin that is being produced. This is easily reversible with the right diet, exercise, and changes in any other contributing lifestyle factors, such as stress or sleep problems.

With type 2 diabetes, things

have deteriorated beyond insulin resistance. By the time the disease is diagnosed, it's estimated that between 40 and 50 percent of beta cells in the pancreas, which produce insulin, are no longer functioning.

The beta cells may be dead or dormant from exhaustion. If enough beta cells die, the disease can become what is sometimes called diabetes 1.5: it's between type 2 and type 1, where the inability to produce insulin marks the disease.

How much can it be reversed? It depends on how much damage has been done and how diligently someone works at reversing the condition. Generally, the longer type 2 diabetes has been present and the higher the A1c, the more damage has occurred. However, a major reduction in carbs or a good exercise program for someone who has been sedentary can quickly improve blood sugar and wellbeing in many cases.

No matter how far diabetes has progressed, significant improvement is always possible.

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.