Dr. Marlene's
NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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The Real Culprit of Chronic Disease — Part Two

The Hormone Running the Show

Why Eating "Healthy" Doesn't Always Change the Instructions

Last week, we talked about why blood sugar is tied to far more than diabetes — how it quietly influences energy, mood, inflammation, and long-term disease risk, often without anyone realizing what's driving it. This week, we need to talk about the hormone that quietly runs the entire show: insulin.

Most people are taught to focus on lowering blood sugar. And yes — having stable blood sugar matters. But that focus skips over something critical. Blood sugar is simply the number we measure. Insulin is the signal that determines what the body actually does with that number.

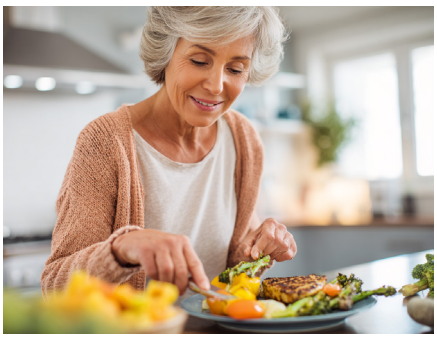
Blood sugar is the smoke. Insulin is the fire.

Yet most people are never told to think about insulin unless they've already been diagnosed with diabetes — which is a bit like waiting until the house is fully engulfed before asking where the smoke came from. Do you see how backwards that is?

Insulin doesn't just move sugar out of the bloodstream. It directs storage. It influences inflammation. It affects cravings, fat metabolism, hormone signaling, circulation, and long-term disease risk. In many ways, insulin acts like the manager of your entire metabolic system — deciding whether fuel gets used efficiently or quietly stored away.

Once you understand insulin, a lot of confusion starts to clear. Symptoms that once felt unrelated begin to line up. Patterns that didn't make sense start to make sense.

Not because the body is broken — but because it's responding exactly the way it's designed to respond to the signals it's receiving.



So when someone says, "I've changed my diet, but my body doesn't seem to respond," that's usually not mysterious once you understand insulin. It simply means the hormonal instructions haven't changed yet — even though the behavior has.

And that distinction turns out to matter a lot.

How the Body Actually Works: Why Insulin Makes the Rules

Insulin is a hormone made by the pancreas. Its job is to move glucose out of the bloodstream and into cells so it can be used for energy — that's the part most people vaguely know.

What often gets missed is that insulin has another equally important role. Insulin doesn't just move fuel; it gives the body instructions. Specifically, it tells the body to store — store glucose, store fat, and store energy for later.

That's not a flaw or a design problem. It's a survival mechanism. Without insulin, the body wouldn't be able to manage fuel at all, and survival wouldn't be possible.

The problem is that modern life creates constant insulin signaling. We eat far more carbohydrates than the body can handle, and we eat them all day long. We snack. We drink carbs. We eat late. We eat "healthy" carbs that still spike glucose. We rarely give the body time to return to baseline.We often don't exercise (or enough), and if we do, it's for a period of time and THEN we sit at our desks for hours.

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877-300-7849 · support@primalhealthlp.com

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

And here's a kicker: insulin in the blood stream completely prevents you from burning fat. Yes, you heard that correctly — every time you eat a carb and trigger insulin, it prevents you from burning fat. But let's get back to you sitting down for hours at a time.

Insulin stays elevated because we don't move enough, and we eat too many carbs, and our system is now "trained" to react with extra insulin. And all that insulin causes weight gain.

When insulin stays elevated, the body stops listening as well. Cells become less sensitive to insulin, because they're tired of being "bathed" in insulin, which means the pancreas has to produce more insulin to get the same job done. This is insulin resistance.

Here's what people miss: insulin resistance is not just "a diabetes thing." It's a chronic disease thing. It's one of the most common metabolic problems in the modern world, and it often starts long before blood sugar numbers look "bad." I mean, like 15-20 years before it shows up on a blood test. Not to mention that fasting insulin is nearly never tested, even though it's the first marker to go awry when people start having blood sugar issues. Which means, if your doctor ran fasting insulin on a standard blood test when you were 40 years old, you'd have known long in advance if you were starting to have problem.

This is why people can have "normal" labs and still have symptoms. The body can keep blood sugar looking normal for years by producing more insulin behind the scenes — a compensation that often goes unnoticed because fasting insulin is rarely tested. That hidden cost shows up as cravings, fatigue, stubborn belly weight, rising blood pressure, brain fog, inflammation, and the sense that your body is harder to manage than it used to be.

So no — you don't need a diabetes diagnosis for insulin to be an issue. You just need to be living in the modern world.

WHY "HEALTHY" DIETS STILL FAIL

This is where people get understandably frustrated.

They eat "clean." They eat whole grains. They eat fruit. They cut calories. They stop eating junk. And they still don't feel better. Sometimes they even feel worse — hungrier, more tired, more cravings, more belly fat, more brain fog. Why?

Because you can eat "healthy" foods that still keep insulin high.

A bowl of oatmeal with fruit and local honey might look like the healthiest breakfast on earth. But if you're already insulin resistant, that meal can spike glucose fast, raise insulin fast, and then crash you two hours later. Then you're hungry again. Then you snack. Then insulin rises again. Then you assume you have no willpower, when the truth is your physiology is being yanked around.

Insulin makes the rules.

This is also why calorie restriction backfires for so many people. Cutting calories without addressing insulin often leads to slowed metabolism, increased cravings, higher cortisol, and worse energy. Because the body doesn't interpret restriction as "getting healthy." It interprets less food as stress. And stress hormones make insulin resistance worse.

So yes — people can be eating "healthy," doing "everything right," and still feel like they're losing. Because they're playing the wrong game.

PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE: Where to Start

The goal here is not perfection. The goal is to reduce constant insulin signaling so your body can return to a more stable metabolic rhythm — one where fuel is predictable instead of chaotic.

This doesn't require starvation, obsession, or extreme dieting. It doesn't require tracking every bite or living in fear of food. But it does require understanding the pattern your body has been responding to for years.

Every time insulin rises, your body receives the same basic instruction: store energy, don't burn it. That's not a flaw — it's how insulin is designed to work. The problem arises when insulin is elevated all day, every day, without meaningful breaks.

When that happens, the body doesn't spend enough time in fat-burning mode. It doesn't spend enough time in repair mode. It doesn't spend enough time in a calm, regulated state. Instead, it stays stuck in a constant "storage and management" phase, which quietly drives many of the symptoms people struggle with.

This is why stabilizing insulin often improves things people didn't even expect — mood, sleep quality, cravings, inflammation, mental clarity, and even blood pressure. Not because insulin is the only factor, but because it influences so many systems at once.

Insulin isn't just a blood sugar hormone. It's a chronic disease hormone.

So instead of obsessing over calories, focus on what actually changes the hormonal environment: meals that hold you, fewer spikes, fewer crashes, and less constant grazing. When insulin settles, the body often feels like it can finally work the way it's meant to.

Try This Today: Three Simple Stabilizers

Make Meals Do More Work

When meals are too light — especially too low in protein and fat — blood sugar rises and falls faster, and insulin becomes more reactive trying to keep up. That's when people feel hungry again quickly, restless, foggy, or like they need something "extra" just to get through the next few hours.
Try making breakfast and lunch more stabilizing. This doesn't mean eating more food or forcing yourself to eat when you're not hungry. It means eating food that actually provides steady fuel. Protein and fat slow digestion, steady blood sugar, and reduce how hard insulin has to work. Most people are genuinely surprised by how much calmer their energy feels when the first meal of the day isn't just carbs in disguise.

Stop Feeding the "Snack Loop"

Frequent snacking — especially on carbohydrate-heavy foods — keeps insulin elevated all day long. When that happens, the body never gets a chance to reset. This isn't about discipline or self-control. You're not eating all day because something is wrong with you — you're eating all day because your blood sugar is unstable and your system is trying to compensate. If the goal is to improve insulin sensitivity, the body needs some space between meals so insulin can actually come down. And if you truly do need a snack, choose something that supports stability — protein and fat — instead of something that spikes insulin again and restarts the cycle.

Be Honest About Liquid Sugar

Liquid carbohydrates are one of the fastest ways to drive insulin up without realizing it. Juice, smoothies, sweetened coffee drinks, flavored "health" beverages, and even some protein shakes deliver sugar quickly, without the buffering effect of chewing or fiber. Blood sugar rises fast — and insulin has to respond just as fast. What you sip throughout the day matters just as much as what you eat — sometimes more.

What's Next?

Part Three of The Real Culprit of Chronic Disease

In Part Three, we're going to talk about what blood sugar does to the brain — not just long-term dementia risk, but everyday function. Brain fog, mood swings, memory lapses, "why can't I think today?"… those aren't always emotional problems. They're often fuel problems. Once you understand how quickly the brain reacts to unstable blood sugar, you start taking stability seriously — not because you're afraid of diabetes, but because you want your brain sharp for decades.

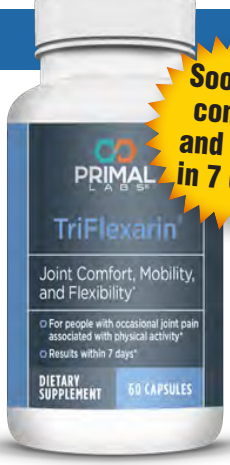
About Dr. Marlene

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

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

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

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 at 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-chondrotin.[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

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(12) Pietrzkowski, Z et al, Clin Interv Aging, 2014 (13) Lugo, JP et al. Nutrition Journal, Vol 15, No. 1 Jan 2016 (14) Lugo, JP, et al. J Int Soc Sports Nutr 2013 Oct

Q&A

Q: **Can magnesium really help sleep? — Thomas N.**

A: For some people, absolutely. Magnesium plays a key role in calming the nervous system, relaxing muscles, and supporting more stable blood sugar — all of which matter for sleep. It helps regulate neurotransmitters involved in turning the brain "down" at night and supports the parasympathetic, or rest-and-digest, side of the nervous system. When magnesium is low, the body tends to stay a little more wired, even when you're exhausted.

Magnesium is also easily depleted by stress, sugar intake, caffeine, alcohol, and many common medications, which is why deficiency is so common. People who have trouble falling asleep, wake frequently, clench their jaw, get restless legs, or feel physically tense at night are often the ones who notice the biggest benefit. It's not that magnesium is sedating — it simply removes some of the barriers that prevent the body from settling.

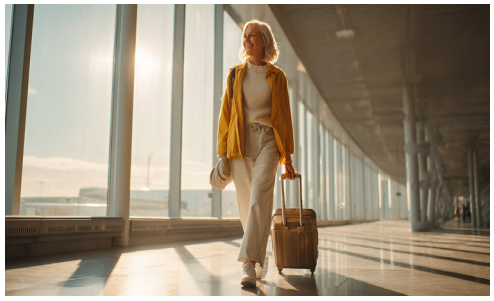
That said, it's not a magic fix, and it doesn't work the same way for everyone. Different forms are absorbed differently, and some can cause loose stools or digestive upset. So magnesium works best when it's used thoughtfully, as part of supporting the nervous system overall — not as a substitute for sleep, but as a way to make sleep easier when deficiency or nervous system tension is part of the picture.

Q: **Why do I get constipated when I travel? — Erica S.**

A: This is extremely common, and it's rarely just about food. Travel disrupts almost every input the digestive system relies on: routine, sleep, meal timing, hydration, movement, and nervous system regulation. The gut is very sensitive to rhythm, and when that rhythm changes, motility often slows.

A big piece people miss is the nervous system. Travel often shifts the body into a mild "alert" state — new environments, time changes, rushing, sitting for long periods. When the nervous system leans toward fight-or-flight, digestion becomes a lower priority. Peristalsis (the wave-like motion that moves stool through the intestines) slows, even if you're eating normally. That's why constipation can show up even when fiber intake hasn't changed.

Dehydration and prolonged sitting make this worse, as does eating colder or more processed foods than usual. Simple supports often work surprisingly well: drinking enough fluids, gentle walking, eating warm meals, and using magnesium if tolerated. The key shift is this: treat travel constipation as a regulation and rhythm issue, not as a fiber emergency. When the nervous system settles and the body feels safe again, digestion usually follows.



Q: **Why do I get itchy skin in winter? — Megan S.**

A: Winter itch is often blamed on dry air — and that's part of the story — but it's rarely just a surface issue. Cold weather and indoor heating strip moisture from the skin and reduce humidity, while circulation to the skin can decrease as the body prioritizes core warmth. That combination alone can make skin feel tight, irritated, or itchy, even without a visible rash.

But itchiness can also reflect internal factors like dehydration, inflammation, histamine sensitivity, and blood sugar instability, all of which affect skin barrier function and nerve sensitivity. This is why itching often feels worse at night or seems to come and go without a clear trigger. Moisturizers can help, but they don't address the underlying drivers. Supporting the skin from the inside — with fluids, healthy fats, and steadier blood sugar — often calms itchiness more effectively than topical products alone.

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.