Dr. Marlene's
NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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The Real Culprit of Chronic Disease — Part Three

Brain Fog Isn't Random

Blood Sugar Shapes Focus, Mood, and Memory

Last week, we talked about insulin — not as something that only matters if you've been diagnosed with diabetes, but as the quiet signal that tells the body what to do with fuel all day long. Store it. Use it. Save it. Burn it. That one hormone explains far more about weight, cravings, and energy than most people realize.

This week, we're taking that same conversation somewhere people almost never expect it to go: the brain.

When people hear "blood sugar issues," they tend to think about numbers on a lab report or maybe weight changes. They don't usually connect it to brain fog. Or mood swings. Or that strange feeling of being mentally present but not quite sharp. Or the moment when you walk into a room and suddenly can't remember why you went there in the first place.

And yet, for many people, the brain is one of the first places blood sugar instability shows up.

The brain is an energy-hungry organ. It uses a disproportionate amount of glucose, and it relies on that fuel arriving steadily and predictably. When fuel delivery is smooth, thinking feels easier. Focus comes more naturally. Emotions feel more regulated. When fuel delivery is uneven, the brain has to adapt — and those adaptations don't always feel good.

That can show up as fogginess, irritability, low motivation, anxiety, or the sense that everything takes more effort than it used to. People often chalk this up to stress, aging, or "just having a lot going on." Sometimes that's true. But sometimes it's simply a brain trying to function on fuel that keeps changing speed.

This is also why these symptoms can feel so confusing. They don't announce themselves as a blood sugar issue. They feel personal. Mental. Emotional. Random. But when you step back and look at the pattern, they're often remarkably consistent — tied to meals, timing, and energy dips throughout the day.

Blood sugar doesn't just affect the brain in some distant, long-term way. It affects how clearly you think, how reactive you feel, and how resilient your nervous system is right now. In real time. Every day.

How the Body Actually Works: The Brain Runs on Fuel

Your brain uses a huge amount of energy. It's basically a high-maintenance roommate that never stops consuming resources, and it gets cranky when the delivery truck is late.

When blood sugar rises too high, then drops too fast, your brain doesn't interpret that as "a small metabolic fluctuation." It interprets it as a threat to its fuel supply. And when the brain perceives a threat, it does what it's designed to do: it activates stress physiology to keep you functional.

- That can look like irritability.
- It can look like anxiety.
- It can look like sudden fatigue.
- It can look like brain fog.
- It can look like "I can't think straight unless I eat something."

Now let's go one level deeper — because the short-term effects are annoying, but the long-term effects are where this becomes a chronic disease issue.

When blood sugar is consistently elevated (and when insulin is chronically high), it tends to drive inflammation and oxidative stress. Over time, that affects blood vessels, circulation, and nerve function. And the brain is extremely sensitive to circulation problems — especially the tiny vessels that supply oxygen and nutrients.

This is one reason blood sugar problems can be connected to cognitive decline and dementia risk. It's not just "sugar rotting the brain" like a cartoon villain. It's the combination of inflammation, vascular damage, insulin resistance in the brain, and metabolic dysfunction that changes how brain cells survive over time.

And yes — researchers have even discussed Alzheimer's as having a strong metabolic component. You'll hear it nicknamed "Type 3 diabetes" in research papers. That label is debated, but the underlying point is worth taking seriously: metabolic dysfunction and insulin resistance are strongly connected to brain outcomes.

Which means something very important: you don't wait until memory is failing to care about blood sugar. You care about blood sugar because you want your brain to stay sharp for decades.

And if you have a family history of dementia, or you've noticed subtle changes in memory or mental clarity, blood sugar stability becomes one of the smartest areas to focus on — not out of fear, but out of strategy.

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PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE: Where to Start

This is where things often get confusing — not because the symptoms are subtle, but because they get treated as if they're unrelated.

- Brain fog gets handled like a sleep issue.
- Mood swings get treated as emotional stress.
- Memory lapses get brushed off as aging.
- Anxiety gets blamed on a busy life or a full plate.

And sometimes those factors are part of the picture. Sleep, stress, and life demands absolutely matter. But very often, they're not where the problem begins — they're where it shows up.

When blood sugar is unstable underneath it all, the brain has to work harder just to stay online. It's constantly compensating, constantly adjusting, constantly trying to make do with inconsistent fuel. And the tricky part is that the brain doesn't send a clear message saying, "Fuel delivery is inconsistent today." It can't. Instead, that instability shows up indirectly — as changes in focus, mood, memory, and mental stamina.

That's because the brain doesn't separate problems the way we tend to. It doesn't categorize issues into neat buckets like "thinking," "emotion," or "energy." From the brain's perspective, those are all the same system. It simply responds to whether it has reliable access to fuel — and whether that fuel arrives on time.

This is why pattern recognition matters far more than symptom labeling.

If you notice that your mental clarity changes depending on when you last ate, how long it's been since a real meal, or what that meal contained, that's not random noise. That's useful information about how your brain is being supported.

If you're consistently sharper after meals that include protein and fat, and more foggy, irritable, or scattered after meals that are mostly carbohydrates, that's not coincidence — it's a metabolic response.

If your mood reliably dips in the late afternoon and lifts soon after eating, that's not mysterious or psychological. It's the nervous system responding to shifts in fuel availability and stress signaling.

Once you start paying attention to these patterns, the entire picture changes. Instead of treating each symptom as a separate problem to solve, you begin to see how they're connected by a shared underlying driver.

And when that driver is supported — when fuel becomes steadier and more predictable — many of these brain-related symptoms soften together.

Not because each symptom was addressed individually.
But because the brain is no longer being asked to function under unstable conditions.

That's when mental clarity becomes more consistent.
That's when mood feels less reactive.
And that's when the brain stops feeling like the hardest system to manage.

Try This Today: Three Brain-Supporting Stabilizers

Don't make your brain run on "breakfast vibes."

A light, sweet, or carb-only breakfast often feels fine at first — but it tends to create a predictable rise-and-crash pattern later. The crash doesn't always feel like hunger. More often it shows up as fogginess, irritability, trouble focusing, or that low-grade urge to snack. That's simply the brain reacting to fuel that didn't last long enough. A steadier breakfast — one that includes protein and fat, not just carbohydrates — gives the brain a more reliable energy supply. Many people are surprised by how much clearer and more stable they feel when breakfast does more work, without eating more food overall.

Treat the afternoon dip like a fuel signal.

If mental clarity falls apart around 3 or 4 PM, it's usually information — not a mystery. Look at lunch. Look at how long it's been since you last ate. Look at whether caffeine has been carrying more of the load than food. Afternoon crashes are common when earlier meals don't hold long enough. And again, the dip doesn't always feel like hunger — it can feel like mental fatigue or irritability. For many people, a small fat-based snack, like a scoop of peanut butter or some cheese, helps smooth that drop. In general, going much longer than three hours without eating tends to make blood sugar — and brain function — less predictable.

Use movement as a brain-support tool, not an exercise program.

More intensity isn't always better. Hard workouts can actually deplete blood sugar and make crashes worse for some people. The goal here is support, not stress.Gentle movement — a short walk after meals, light stretching, moving more throughout the day — helps muscles pull glucose out of the bloodstream so it can be used instead of crashing later. When blood sugar steadies, the brain usually steadies with it.The point isn't to add pressure. It's to make the brain's job easier.

What's Next?

Part Four of The Real Culprit of Chronic Disease

In Part Four, we're going to talk about one of the most underestimated blood sugar problems: how it drives inflammation and pain.

Because blood sugar doesn't just affect your weight or your labs. It affects your joints, your nerves, your circulation, and even how quickly you recover from stress. And once you see how connected those things are, you stop treating symptoms like separate battles — and you start addressing the real driver underneath them.

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.

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Q&A

Q: **Why do I wake up with a dry mouth even if I drank water yesterday? — Danielle K.**

A: Dry mouth is often more about airflow and nervous system tone than simply "not drinking enough water." One of the most common causes is mouth breathing during sleep and many people have no idea they're doing it. Nasal congestion, allergies, snoring, or even your sleeping position can push you into breathing through your mouth overnight, which dries tissues out very quickly.

Certain medications can contribute as well, especially antihistamines, antidepressants, and some blood pressure medications, all of which reduce saliva production. Stress and nighttime nervous system activation can also decrease saliva flow, making dryness worse even when hydration seems adequate.

If this happens occasionally, simple steps can help: humidifying your bedroom, addressing nasal congestion, or using a nasal rinse before bed. Some people even find that lightly moisturizing the inside of the nose helps reduce dryness overnight. I've even had a patient use a small piece of tape to gently keep her mouth closed while sleeping not glamorous, but very effective for breaking the habit.

If dry mouth is frequent, especially if it comes with snoring, morning headaches, fatigue, or poor sleep quality, it's worth looking more closely at nasal airflow, sleep patterns, and medication effects.

Q: **Why does my heart sometimes race for "no reason"? — Keith W.**

A: A racing heart can absolutely happen without an obvious trigger but that doesn't mean there isn't one. The heart is highly responsive to changes in the nervous system, blood chemistry, and energy availability, and it often reacts before your conscious mind connects the dots. Common contributors include caffeine sensitivity, dehydration, low minerals (especially magnesium), poor sleep, blood sugar drops, or a stress response that isn't being experienced as "stress" emotionally.

Blood sugar dips are a big one people miss. When blood sugar drops too quickly, the body releases adrenaline to bring it back up — and adrenaline can make the heart race, even if you're sitting still. Hormonal shifts, illness, low-grade infection, or simply being run down can also make the heart more reactive than usual. Certain medications, supplements, or even changes in dosage can play a role as well.

If it's rare, brief, and resolves on its own, it's often benign. But if episodes are frequent, worsening, or accompanied by dizziness, chest pain, fainting, or shortness of breath, that's something to discuss with your provider. The key is to notice patterns without panicking — the heart is often giving early feedback about stress, fuel, or recovery long before labs look abnormal.

Q: **Why do I get a runny nose when I eat? — Omar G.**

A: This is often a normal reflex called gustatory rhinitis. It happens when the nervous system stimulates the nasal glands during eating, leading to a runny nose. Hot, spicy, or strongly flavored foods are common triggers, but for some people it can happen with any meal. It's not an allergy — it's a reflex, similar to how some people sneeze in bright light.

Some people simply have more sensitive nasal pathways, so temperature changes, steam from food, spices, or even the act of chewing can trigger it. As we age, this reflex can become more noticeable because the nervous system's regulation of secretions changes slightly over time.

If it's mild, predictable, and limited to eating, it's usually harmless and doesn't need treatment. But if it's new, severe, or accompanied by other symptoms like itching, wheezing, swelling, or digestive reactions, that's when it's worth considering food sensitivities, true allergies, or chronic nasal inflammation. As with most things, the pattern matters more than the symptom itself.

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.