

# Live Healthy—Be Happy

A Practical Guide to  
Nutrition & Exercise  
for Maintaining  
Health and Vitality

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## Taming the Blood Sugar Beast

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A Newsletter for the  
Patients of Healthcare  
Providers

Medical Advisor  
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### Shopping Tips

**Buy whole grains** rather than “quick-cooking” grains. “Instant” rice and oatmeal are refined carbohydrates that will elevate blood sugars more rapidly.

Look for the words **“100% whole wheat, rye, oats”** or other grain in the ingredient labels on breads and crackers.

Avoid processed grain foods like crackers that contain added sugars.

**Buy fresh fruit** instead of fruit juices that are sweetened with high fructose corn syrup or fruit juice concentrate.

**Shop the outer aisles of your grocery store for whole foods.**

Over the past ten years, there has been a tremendous rise in the number of people in the United States who have been diagnosed with Type II diabetes, a disease in which the body does not properly control the amount of sugar in the bloodstream. This results in dangerously high levels of sugar that can damage the blood vessels, heart, brain, kidneys, and the eyes. Diabetics have a higher risk for strokes, kidney failure, heart attacks, blindness, serious infections, and many cancers. This disease is now even affecting adolescents in shocking numbers.

Maintaining healthy blood sugar levels is essential to preventing diabetes. In this newsletter, I will discuss the effect of different dietary choices on blood sugar levels.

### How do our bodies regulate blood sugar levels?

Insulin is the primary hormone that regulates our blood sugar levels. The foods that have the strongest effect on insulin production are carbohydrates. Carbohydrate foods include everything from vegetables, fruits, and whole grains like brown rice and quinoa, to refined carbohydrates like pastries, crackers, cold cereals, candies, pasta, and non-whole grain bread. Carbohydrates are broken down by our digestive systems into simple sugars and then absorbed into our blood. Insulin is then produced in order to move these sugars, as well as digested fats and proteins, from the bloodstream into our cells. In our cells, these nutrients are used to produce energy, rebuild structures, and make hormones and other chemicals that our bodies require to function.

### Insulin Resistance and the Development of Diabetes

When we eat sugar foods and refined carbohydrates like pasta, bagels, and pastries, our blood sugar levels rise rapidly, and higher levels of insulin are produced. If we constantly eat these foods, our bodies will respond by overproducing insulin. Over time, our cells become “resistant” to our own insulin. The result: The sugars stay in our bloodstream where they do widespread damage. Chronically high blood sugar levels contribute to other problems like weight gain, elevated cholesterol and triglyceride levels, and high blood pressure. If a person does not reduce dietary intake of simple sugars and refined carbohydrates, insulin resistance will usually progress to full-blown diabetes.

Marsha Sendar maintains a private practice in Santa Rosa providing physical therapy services, nutrition consultation, healthy exercise, and stress management instruction, and teaches classes at various locations in Sonoma County. For more information, or to receive a copy of the newsletter, contact Marsha at 707-570-2090, or send an email to [marsha@marshasendar.com](mailto:marsha@marshasendar.com).

**Glycemic Load Values for some Commonly Eaten Foods:**

**Fettucine (1 cup) = 18.2**  
**Bagel(med) = 24**  
**Baked potato = 14**  
**Sweet potato (baked)= 8.6**  
**Cooked carrots (1/2 c) =1.5**  
**Large peach = 3**  
**100% whole grain, unsweetened bread (1 slice) = 4**  
**Hamburger bun= 15**  
**Corn Flakes (1c) =21.8**  
**Instant Rice (1c) = 33**  
**Brown Rice (1c) =16**  
**Pancake (1 large from dry mix) = 39**  
**French Fries Fine Cut (small serving) = 36**  
**Dates (5 pieces) = 27.8**  
**Coca Cola (12 oz) =25.2**

**Examples of Carbohydrate Foods with Low Glycemic Loads**

**All berries**  
**Black beans**  
**Lentils**  
**Kidney Beans**  
**Split Peas**  
**Peas**  
**Asparagus**  
**Broccoli**  
**Eggplant**  
**Mushrooms**  
**Leafy Green Veggies**  
**Green Beans**  
**Apples**  
**Pears**  
**Winter Squash**

**Choosing Foods to Maintain Healthy Blood Sugar Levels**

The best way to maintain healthy blood sugar levels through diet is to choose carbohydrate foods that have a lower **glycemic load**. Foods that are sweetened with simple sugars like sucrose, fructose, and maltose will have a higher glycemic load because they are digested quickly and cause a rapid rise in blood sugar levels. The same is true of refined carbohydrate foods like cold cereals, instant oatmeal, white rice, and white flour products like non-whole grain bread and pasta. **Whole foods** that have not been altered from their natural form, such as vegetables, many fresh fruits, and whole grains contain a lot of fiber, which slows their digestion and results in less impact on blood sugar levels.

Foods with low glycemic loads are rated from 1-10.

Foods with medium glycemic loads are rated from 11-19.

Foods with high glycemic loads are rated 20 or higher.

**See the sidebar for glycemic load values for some common foods.**

**8 Simple Food Strategies for Maintaining Healthy Blood Sugars**

1. Avoid white flour products like bagels, non-whole grain bread and crackers, and pastries.
2. Avoid sugary foods like candies and sodas.
3. If you like pasta, eat a small (1cup) portion and always combine it with protein foods like chicken, fish, beans, or meat to help decrease its effect on your blood sugar levels.
4. Do not skip meals.
5. Always eat protein at breakfast: Eat 2 eggs combined with a piece of whole grain toast or a piece of fresh fruit; a protein smoothie with plain yogurt and fresh fruit; plain yogurt with fresh fruit (especially berries) and some raw almonds or walnuts; or cottage cheese with fresh fruit.
6. Eat a piece of fresh fruit rather than drinking fruit juices. It is best to combine a fruit snack with a little bit of protein, like almond butter, raw nuts or seeds, or a little yogurt or cottage cheese.
7. Drink alcohol very moderately and combine with food.
8. Replace refined carbohydrates with starchy carbohydrates from these whole food sources: sweet potatoes, winter squash, cooked beets or carrots, or whole grains like quinoa, brown rice, millet, oats, and barley.