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## Healing Diabetes with Food

**Dr. Nandita Shah**, one of the pioneers of modern vegan practice in India, writes about how diabetes can be cured through careful eating.

Among my earliest patients was a 70-year-old man who had been diabetic for 30 years. He came to me not because of his diabetes but because of its complications. He was losing his vision and had neuropathy.

Despite medication, his sugar was not controlled. His fasting blood sugar was 222. Within two weeks of stopping the dairy-based food in his vegetarian diet, his fasting blood sugar dropped to 88! He improved to the extent that he no longer needed any medication and could even have jaggery in his sweets without having high blood sugar.

Another patient was a young man of 21, who had been told by his doctor that he would have to take insulin lifelong. He was taking three injections of insulin a day. Within just two weeks, he was off all insulin and had normal blood sugar levels!

This is important because, despite controlling blood sugar levels with diet and medication, most diabetics end up suffering from a variety of dreaded complications from neuropathy to loss of vision, kidney failure, heart attack and gangrene. Taking responsibility for our own health results in a transformation not just in the body but in mind and spirit as well.

### Can diabetes really be reversed?

Most people with diabetes are given

the same advice by their doctors — cut down carbohydrates, cut out sugars, get more exercise and take medication, i.e. insulin. This is a life sentence. Everyone knows that this does not cure diabetes! Despite this, most diabetics are willing to follow this advice only because there is comfort in doing what everybody else does. We are herd animals, whether we like it or not!

### Solving a problem is better than controlling it

In order to solve any problem, one needs to find the cause and eliminate it. Sugar is not the cause of diabetes, so no amount of cutting of sugar and carbohydrates can reverse or cure diabetes.

In fact, it's the other way around. Blood sugar levels rise due to diabetes and not because of it. Diabetes is caused due to insulin resistance or under-production. So it stands to reason that if we understand what the cause of insulin resistance is, or why the body stops producing insulin, and remove this cause, we will be successful in reversing diabetes.

### In a normal healthy person

The muscle cells have receptors for insulin. Insulin normally acts as a key and lodges on the receptors, signalling the gates to allow glucose to enter the muscle cell. This glucose is used by the

cell as energy for all vital functions.

### In a Type II diabetic

The insulin receptors become resistant, i.e. the key does not open the gate and glucose cannot enter. The result is a concentration of glucose in the bloodstream. In order to dilute the glucose, the diabetic drinks more water and urinates to get rid of it. But, along with the water goes the glucose, too. The result is that the glucose, which should have provided energy to the muscle cell, is now unavailable. So the individual's muscles have no energy, and the diabetic experiences this as weakness.

When a doctor is consulted, the patient is generally advised to take antidiabetic drugs, which temporarily reduce insulin resistance. However because the cause of insulin resistance still persists, the diabetes is never cured.

### What causes insulin resistance?

It has been scientifically proven, through the work of Dr Neal Barnard (author of Dr Neal Barnard's Program for Reversing Diabetes), his associates and others in the scientific community that the cause of insulin resistance is intramyocellular lipids (fat in the muscle cells) which reduce the sensitivity of the receptors to insulin.



The other cause could be the insulin-like growth factor present in milk. Since that is very similar to insulin, it blocks the receptors. It's like when you're trying to open a lock with the wrong key, only worse because, here, the wrong key gets stuck in the lock and then the right key can't be used either: the blocked receptors in our body do not let muscle cells use the glucose, which leads to raised sugar levels.

### Golden rules to help you fight insulin resistance

- Eat plant foods in their most natural state and do not use refined products like oil, ghee, butter and vanaspati (hydrogenated fats).
- Cut out animal products, which are naturally high in fats.
- Processed foods are also best avoided as they are typically high in fats and refined ingredients. Add whole foods like whole unpolished rice, whole wheat and unpeeled vegetables and fruits to your diet.
- Avoid all milk and dairy products. Switch to plant-based milks like soy milk, almond milk, oat milk and rice milk.

By making these dietary changes, the individual's glucose levels approach normalcy gradually. If the patient is on medication, regular consultations with doctors become necessary to reduce the dosage, depending on blood sugar levels. With time, all medication can be eliminated.

### The results are exemplary

Just by following the rules mentioned above, one can eventually lead a medication-free life, while some complications due to diabetes could even be reversed. Body weight, if excessive, returns to normal. Cholesterol levels improve and heart disease and hypertension become a rarity.

### Can Type I diabetes be reversed, too?

Type I diabetes is a disorder where insulin is not produced at all, or in very small quantities. According to research, it has been found that infants who are fed animal milk at an early age, instead of their mother's milk, are more likely to develop this type of diabetes. In some



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people, the protein in the cow's milk stimulates production of antibodies, which are basically fighter proteins produced by the immune system with the purpose of fighting the proteins from milk. However, since pancreatic cells are structurally similar to milk proteins, these antibodies destroy the pancreatic cells instead. This reduces the insulin-producing capacity of these cells and leads to Type I diabetes. Other factors include certain chemicals and medications. Although some cases of Type I diabetes cannot be reversed, most cases can over time, resulting in reduction in, or even elimination of, the individual's insulin requirement.

### Time to change

It's important to understand that we can't solve a problem by continuing the same lifestyle that caused it, in the first place. Most people come up with excuses for not following the prescribed lifestyle during times when they aren't at home or are travelling. One way out of this impasse is to acknowledge that it's all in the mind; if one starts believing that one's needs are special and it's difficult to find what one needs, that often becomes the reality. Don't vegetarians travelling to other countries eat? Don't Jains follow their "no eating of root vegetables" rule wherever they go?

In order to sustain the new lifestyle,

one needs to learn how to cook delicious, healthy food without oil. The second important step is to make a commitment to try this out diligently for at least a month. However, remember that consuming sugar, salt, oil or fried foods, meat and dairy products can be as addictive as any habit like smoking.

Even after eating consciously for a whole month, one could fall into the trap again, with just one bite. So it's useful to have the support of friends, family and people who are trying out similar lifestyle changes.



*Dr Nandita Shah is founder-director of the Auroville-based Sanctuary for Health and Reconnection to Animals and Nature (SHARAN). A vegan, Nandita is a successful practising homoeopath who teaches about holistic health and an ecologically sustainable, compassionate lifestyle. She gives talks and lectures on the health benefits of a plant-based diet – which has been repeatedly proved to be the most healthful – and seminars on reversing diabetes, heart disease and hypertension.*

*For details, visit: [www.sharan-india.org](http://www.sharan-india.org)*