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Veggies to fight your diabetes

A recent study has found that a plant-based low fat diet helps diabetics bring down their blood sugar levels and even decreases their need for medication. The seminar on "Reversing Diabetes" starts on Friday in Bangalore

Sahana Charan

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They say that the best way to stay fit is to eat your way to good health. This now seems to be re-affirmed by a study conducted in the US on diabetes and diet. The long term research by Dr Neal Barnard of the Physician's Committee for Responsible Medicine, the findings of which were published in May in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, found that a plant-based vegan diet brought down blood sugar and cholesterol levels and helped keep all their parameters under control. In fact, the study claims that such a diet, which is different from the regular diabetic diets prescribed to patients, actually helps people lose weight and reduce their medication.

Dr Barnard will be presenting a three-day seminar in Bangalore, starting December 4, to share findings of his research and homeopath and cookery expert Dr Nandita Shah will conduct cooking classes to demonstrate how to prepare healthful plant-based meals that can help prevent and treat diabetes.

WHAT IS PLANT-BASED LOW FAT DIET

According to Dr Barnard, a low-fat vegan diet is one which is meat and dairy products free and comprises the four food groups — grains, legumes, vegetables, and fruit. These plant foods have little or no fat and zero cholesterol and are packed with fibre and other healthful compounds.

"What is unique about this particular diet programme is that is it different from the standard diabetes diets because it places no limits on calories, carbohydrates or portions.

Patients can eat what they want and as much as they want, as long as they stick to these food groups. There is no restriction on sugar. Even then they can experience weight loss, lower cholesterol and other benefits," Nandita Shah told Bangalore Mirror.

The seminar aims at telling people how a whole food diet can be tasty and is easy to make. "Instead of refined food, we recommend people to switch to whole food, such as brown rice instead of white rice, cutting down on white bread, including lot so of fruits and vegetables, fibre-rich food and also teach them cooking without oil," she adds.

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE SUGAR

Most diabetic diets are based on the premise that little or no sugar in the diet and the focus is on cutting down the calories. "But actually, sugar is not what causes diabetes. It is the fat, and that is what Dr Barnard's diet programme is aimed at, at bringing down the fat levels in the body, which in turn helps the insulin to do its work," says Dr Nandita.

When someone has diabetes, insulin (the hormone produced in the pancreas) has a difficult time moving sugar out of the bloodstream and into that person's cells. That's because tiny amounts of fat in the person's cells prevent the insulin from "opening" the cell membrane. Instead, these bits of fat — which build up when a person eats a high-fat diet — clog the cell and the insulin can't do its job. With the low-fat vegan diet, however, individuals can essentially alter what goes on in their cells. By eliminating most fat from a diet, one can clean up his or her cells, which allows the insulin to move the glucose into the cells where it belongs, she adds.

WHAT NOT TO EAT

According to Dr Barnard, meat-heavy Western eating habits and high fat processed food diets have driven India's diabetes rates through the roof, but a return to plant-based wholesome and low fat diets could reverse this trend. So, what is it that we should not be eating? "Refined flour, white rice, white bread and any other kind of refined food. Instead one can replace these with brown rice, whole wheat and other wholesome forms of all food," says Dr Nandita.

(Reversing Diabetes, the seminar will be held in the city on Dec 4-6 at Sampurnah, #14 Bhattarahalli, Old Madras Rd, Near Garden City College, KR Puram, for details contact Nathaneal - 09687605543, or Shekhar - 41903077)

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