

A photograph of a middle-aged couple riding a bicycle together outdoors. The man, on the left, has grey hair and is wearing a green polo shirt. The woman, on the right, has blonde hair and is wearing a light blue polo shirt. They are both smiling and looking towards the right. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with greenery.

LIVE WELL

# living with

**A**n alarming 60 per cent of diabetes cases could be prevented, or delayed at least, if Australians maintained a healthy weight. While family history and genetics do play a role, good nutrition and regular exercise are essential factors in diabetes management, reports naturopath Caroline Robertson.



A diabetes diagnosis is bitter sweet. It's bitter, balancing diet, exercise and medication so meticulously. But being health conscious has sweet long term benefits. As one of my clients said, "discovering I had diabetes made me look after myself more than if I didn't have it. I started exercising, sorted my diet, lost weight and improved my cholesterol. It's been a blessing in disguise." Though diabetes can affect the eyes, heart, bladder, kidneys, feet, skin, blood pressure and moods, millions of Australian diabetics manage it well. With medicine, supplements, herbs, nutrition and exercise, diabetics can control their condition, living long, happy lives.

### Dealing with diabetes

Whether you have type 1 insulin dependant diabetes or the more common type 2 non-insulin dependant diabetes, the management is very similar. The key is to maintain your ideal weight, cholesterol and blood pressure while enjoying exercise, healthy eating and relaxation. In fact, type 2 diabetes is preventable with these straightforward steps.

### Sugary signs

Diabetes occurs when you have insufficient or ineffective insulin. Some signs of diabetes are constant thirst, excessive urination, extreme hunger, unusual weight loss (type 1), unexplained weight gain (type

2), fatigue and irritability, frequent infections, blurry vision, poor wound healing, tingling and numbness in extremities, recurring infections, swollen or bleeding gums, sweet cravings and impotency. The diabetes risk increases when you're obese, over 45 and have a family history, low HDL cholesterol, high blood pressure, pancreatic damage, polycystic ovarian syndrome, excess waist weight or are exposed to chemicals.

### Diabetes diet

You can still enjoy scrumptious meals with diabetes, simply work with a dietitian or a naturopath to devise a delicious meal plan. Reduce processed foods, sugar,

*continued over*

saturated fats and salt. Incorporate blood sugar balancing foods including:

**Cinnamon** is a sweet spice that lowers blood sugar. It also augments insulin, eases inflammation and cholesterol.

**Turmeric** contains curcumin, which has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant qualities and is reportedly responsible for improving insulin resistance.

**Bitter melon** extensive evidence supports its use to reduce blood sugar levels by blocking sugar absorption and boosting sugar metabolism. Its hypoglycaemic and lipid-lowering properties are due to charantin and the insulin-like peptides and alkaloids it contains.

Other beneficial foods for diabetics are buckwheat, broccoli, cloves, coffee, sage, garlic, onions, pomegranate, jackfruit, figs, Chinese yams, Reishi mushrooms, kidney beans, lentils, soybeans and curry leaves.

### Some eating guidelines for diabetes

- Choose fibre rich foods with a low

glycemic index. Visit the website [www.glycemicindex.com](http://www.glycemicindex.com). At least 35g of fibre daily is recommended. Try oat bran, barley, flaxseed, slippery elm, psyllium, fruits, vegetables, legumes, rice bran, nuts or seeds.

- Focus on fresh vegetables, wholegrains, beans, nuts and low fructose fruit.
- Eat regular meals, timed evenly throughout the day.
- Reduce saturated fat by avoiding deep fried and fatty foods.
- Match the amount of food you eat with the amount you burn up each day. It's especially important to eat before and after exercise.
- Strictly limit foods with sugar. Instead use stevia which has anti-diabetic properties, revitalizing damaged beta cells according to a 2011 study.
- Drink plentiful pure water. High blood sugar can suppress thirst and trick you into thinking you're hungry instead of thirsty.

### Vital nutrients

Supplements support a diabetic to have high energy, strong organs and optimal blood sugar. Here are my top recommendations -

- **Magnesium:** Most diabetics are deficient in magnesium. Studies show that blood sugar control is compromised by low magnesium. It interrupts insulin secretion and increases insulin resistance.
- **Vitamin B12:** Vitamin B12 deficiency is common in diabetics because the diabetes drug metformin destroys B12. Studies have shown that vitamin B12 reduced the symptoms of diabetic neuropathy in 39 per cent of people studied.
- **Chromium:** A constituent of glucose tolerance factor, chromium increases insulin receptors, boosts receptor binding and activates insulin.
- **Vitamin E:** Around 40 per cent of diabetics have a gene variation that means they are at significantly increased

# Diabetes herbal dispensary



A plethora of plants help keep diabetes in check. Consider these in consultation with your healthcare provider:

**Gymnema sylvestre** is an Indian herb known as the 'sugar destroyer.' Its hypoglycaemic action is due to gymnemic acids, which lower blood sugar by raising insulin, restoring pancreatic cells and preventing adrenal hormones from stimulating the liver to produce glucose.



**Barberry and Golden Seal** are considered important to manage diabetes in Chinese medicine. These herbs contain berberine which induces insulin-producing beta cell regeneration.



**Bilberry** protects a diabetic's eyes and nerves through its antioxidant anthocyanidins. Bilberry also lowered blood sugar in animal studies.



**Ginkgo biloba** boosts retinal capillary blood flow in type 2 diabetics.

risk of heart disease. One study found that 400IU of vitamin E daily could help reduce diabetics' risk of stroke, heart attack and cardiovascular death by a massive 50 per cent.

- **Vitamin D:** This helps maintain healthy insulin levels in type 2 diabetes.
- **Zinc:** Zinc is involved in all stages of insulin metabolism, it also protects against the destruction of insulin-producing beta cells.
- **L-taurine** is depleted in many diabetics. This deficiency can contribute to kidney failure and liver problems.

## Exercise

Both aerobic and resistance training exercise improves insulin action. Exercise is essential to regulate weight, blood sugar and cholesterol. Daily movement prevents type 2 diabetes and reduces the rate of complications with diabetics.

## Sweet serenity

Stress raises blood sugar by increasing insulin. It's vital to manage stress with meditation, relaxation, exercise, counseling and a sane schedule.

For diabetics it is important that you do not add or change any supplements in your daily routine without first consulting your natural health practitioner. [Go](#)

Naturopath Caroline Robertson has practised and taught natural therapies for over 25 years. For skype or clinic consultations, health retreats and guided meditations visit [www.carolinerobertson.com.au](http://www.carolinerobertson.com.au).