

Mother Nurture

© Rick Hanson, Ph.D., and Jan Hanson, M.S., L.Ac., 2005

Preventing Type II Diabetes

We've got two kids, ages 1 and 3, and I'm about 20 pounds heavier today than I was before my first pregnancy. I feel run-down and often a little blue, so I "feed my sweet tooth" probably more than is good for me. I'm a little worried about where all this is going

Honestly, you should be a little worried. The average mother is about 10 pounds heavier than a comparable woman without children, moms tend to eat high-carb quick foods on the run, and mothers are at heightened risk for Type II diabetes – all of which are related.

Type II diabetes is a serious illness that is rising dramatically. Essentially, it's a condition in which the body has grown increasingly insensitive to the hormone, insulin, which makes it harder and harder to get "fuel" into the cells where it's needed, so the body produces more and more insulin, which just makes the cells even more oblivious to it, in a vicious cycle.

When this happens, you feel run-down and you're vulnerable to many of the nasty consequences of standard, "juvenile" diabetes, including JAN SAY. And even if you don't develop full-blown Type II diabetes, partway there is a syndrome of insulin insensitivity that has many of the problems of diabetes in a milder form.

So preventing Type II diabetes is a smart thing to do! And it will make your family eat better and help keep your kids off that slippery slope themselves, since Type II diabetes is increasingly found among teenagers.

You knock out Type II diabetes with a one-two punch: maintain normal (= LOW) insulin levels, and keep your body sensitive to it. Here's how:

Maintain low levels of insulin:

- **Eat a low carbohydrate diet** – Low carbs mean low blood sugars. Plus, the protein that you're eating instead of carbohydrates will raise blood sugar levels only gently, and help them stay there stably for a long time. If you are particularly concerned about Type 2 diabetes, all major sugar sources (including honey and fruit juice) and grain products should be eliminated.
- **When you do consume carbohydrates, eat only those with high fiber content** - Fiber helps spread out the effects of sugar, reducing its negative impact. Carbs with lots of fiber include vegetables, beans, and legumes.

- **Exercise routinely** – Moderate exercise tends to lower blood sugar and insulin levels, and it also helps our cells maintain their sensitivity to insulin. For example, thirty minutes each day of brisk walking is enough to have a major impact on your blood sugar levels – and, of course, on your health in general.
- **Lower your stress** – When your stress level rises, so do your stress hormones, including cortisol and adrenaline. When these go up, so do your levels of blood sugar and insulin. So managing stress is important in the prevention of diabetes. This is a big topic, but the headlines are:
 - Take an honest look at your life and how you could slow down and do less. Really!
 - Throughout your day, take little moments to relax, such as by a big breath or just looking out the window for a few seconds.
 - Cultivate some kind of regular practice – like a craft, meditation, yoga, inspirational reading, journaling, playing music – that is calming and self-nurturing.
 - Reach out to people you like; research has shown that time with friends really helps lower stress (and especially for women).
 - Routinely imagine that positive experiences are soaking into you, becoming a part of you, a resource inside that you can draw on for soothing and encouragement.
- **Maintain (or attain) your optimal weight** – Excess weight correlates with diabetes. One reason is that many causes of being overweight – such as a high carbohydrate diet and little exercise – also lead to diabetes. Additionally, growing evidence indicates that certain fat tissues may generate biochemical processes that contribute to diabetes.

Support high insulin sensitivity through consuming:

- Chromium – Take 500 mg/day.
- Lipoic acid (also called alpha-lipoic acid) – Take 100-300 mg/day.
- Omega-3 oils – Although these are present in fatty fish, you'd be prone to mercury poisoning if you ate enough to get all the omega-3's you need. Therefore, use a high-quality supplement that has been “molecularly distilled” and take enough to consume 500 mg/day of an ingredient called EPA (shown on the label).

These supplements can be found in your local health food store (or on our website, www.NurtureMom.com). The other benefits of these natural substances include decreased risk of cardiovascular disease, a sunnier mood, and improved liver function.

So, follow these important steps, and your risk for diabetes will radically decrease!

(Rick Hanson, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist, Jan Hanson, M.S., L.Ac., is an acupuncturist/nutritionist, and they are raising a daughter and son, ages 13 and 16. With Ricki Pollycove, M.D., they are the first and second authors of Mother Nurture: A Mother's Guide to Health in Body, Mind, and Intimate Relationships, published by Penguin. You can see their website at www.nurturemom.com or email them with questions or comments at info@nurturemom.com; unfortunately, a personal reply may not always be possible.)