

Mother Nurture

© Rick Hanson, Ph.D., and Jan Hanson, M.S., L.Ac., 2004

Low Carbs for Mothers

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. Sorry!

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 inssensitive 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 cardiovascular disease. And even if you don't develop full-blown Type II diabetes, partway there is a syndrome of insulin insensitivity whose problems include fatigue, sugar cravings, and excess weight.

So staying off the slippery slope of insulin problems – or simply avoiding the poor nutrition of the high-sugar, high-carb, “supersized” standard American diet which has made us the most overweight nation in the world – are all smart for a mother.

The key is the low-carb diet that is so often in the news these days. It’s the diet we’re designed for through millions of years of evolution. During almost all that time, there was no consumption of grains, milk products, or refined sugar. People very similar to us ate mostly animal proteins, vegetables, and nuts. Basically, that’s the low carb diet.

Here’s how to do it:

- Have protein with every meal. Make that protein source – chicken, beef, fish, tofu, cheese, almonds, rice and beans, etc. – the centerpiece of the meal.
- Eat tons of vegetables.
- Use starchy vegetables – like potatoes, yams, sweet potatoes, beets, carrots, legumes, beans – as your major source of carbohydrates.
- Consume grains in moderation, and as much as possible, in their “whole” form (e.g., whole wheat, brown rice). Minimize pasta, pizza, bread, bagels, etc.
- Eat no more than one or two pieces of fresh fruit a day. Fruit does have a fair amount of carbohydrates, but it also has lots of important nutrients.
- Keep sugar low. Look at the food labels and try to keep your sugar consumption below 25 grams a day, or as close as possible. (There are about 45 grams of sugar in a Coke. Oops.)
- Drink only moderate amounts of wine or beer – or none at all.
- Eat healthy fats. Avoid the trans-fats found in partially hydrogenated oils (margarine) and deep fried foods. Consume low amounts of saturated fats (e.g., butter, cream, fat in hamburger). Use virgin olive oil for cooking.

(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.)