

GETTING OFF THE ROAD TO DIABETES



Contributed by Heidi Roth, RDN, CHHC

November is National Diabetes Awareness Month, and you might be tempted to tune it out. After all, if you don't have diabetes, it's easy to assume it doesn't apply to you. However, we should all care about our diabetes risk and, more broadly, our metabolic health, given that it is becoming so prevalent! According to the CDC, around **15% of Americans have diabetes** (diagnosed and undiagnosed). Even more concerning, **38% of Americans, more than one in three, have prediabetes** – and most aren't aware of it.

To understand metabolic health, diabetes, and insulin resistance, it's helpful to understand how carbohydrate metabolism works.

Simple carbohydrates, like white bread, pastries, soda, or candy, break down quickly into glucose and are rapidly absorbed into the bloodstream. If you eat them before a workout when you need quick energy, no problem. But if you are sitting at your desk, those fast carbs can cause a sharp spike in blood sugar, followed by high insulin levels and a crash that leaves you tired and craving more.

It's not just an occasional crash that's the problem; it's the pattern. Over time, this blood sugar rollercoaster can make your body less responsive to insulin. That's how insulin resistance develops, often leading to prediabetes. (Of course, this is a simplified explanation; blood sugar regulation is a complex process!)

Why does prediabetes matter? Think of pre diabetes as the on-ramp to the highway that leads to diabetes. But here's some good news! There is also an exit ramp. Both prediabetes and Type 2 diabetes can be slowed or reversed with lifestyle changes. The earlier you catch it, the better your chances of turning things around.

There's one important caveat: while Type 2 diabetes can go into remission, it can't be permanently "cured." Remission is defined as maintaining normal blood sugar (HbA1c <6.5%) for at least 3 months without diabetes medications or surgery. However, relapse is possible if weight is regained or lifestyle changes are not maintained.

Your Diabetes Prevention & Reversal Checklist

1. **Shorten your eating window.** Finish eating 2-3 hours before bed; aim for at least a 12-hour overnight fast.
2. **Fiber, fiber, fiber!** Aim to include at least 30 grams of fiber per day. Fiber slows the absorption of carbohydrates, steadies blood sugar, and nourishes your gut microbiome. To avoid GI discomfort, increase fiber slowly by adding more plant foods such as legumes, nuts, seeds, whole grains, and fruits and vegetables. Psyllium fiber supplementation is a safe and effective way to increase fiber intake. Multiple studies have shown it can lead to significant reductions in fasting glucose levels.
3. **Avoid blood sugar spikes.** Choose real, whole foods and avoid eating carbohydrates alone. Instead, pair them with healthy fats and protein, which slows digestion and reduces glucose spikes. Start your meals with low-glycemic vegetables such as cabbage, broccoli, and asparagus. When choosing whole grains, avoid anything made with flour and instead choose whole grains like quinoa, barley, and steel-cut oats.
4. **Start your day with protein.** Include protein such as eggs, smoked salmon, scrambled tofu, or nut butters with breakfast every day. Protein steadies blood sugar levels and keeps you satisfied.



5. **Balance blood sugar levels with exercise.** Muscles use glucose for fuel, lowering blood sugar naturally. Walk for 10-20 minutes after meals, aim for at least 30 minutes of movement per day. Add strength training to build muscle mass and improve insulin sensitivity.
6. **Swap sugary drinks for water or herbal tea.** Replacing sweetened beverages like juice, soda, and coffee shop drinks with water or unsweetened tea is one of the simplest, most effective changes you can make. Staying hydrated is important, too, as dehydration can cause elevated blood sugar.
7. **Prioritize sleep and stress management.** Stress and poor sleep both play a dramatic role in high blood sugar levels.
8. **Partner with your healthcare provider.** Some people can safely reduce or stop diabetes medications under medical supervision. Even if you aren't diabetic, consider a CGM (continuous glucose monitor) and track your A1C yearly.

Take Action This Month

This November, focus on steady progress, one healthy habit at a time, and you'll be investing in your long-term energy and well-being.

- Schedule your annual check-up and ask for an A1C test, as well as fasting insulin levels.
- Add one more serving of fiber today. Beans, veggies, or chia pudding all count!
- Swap one sugary drink for sparkling water or herbal tea.
- End dinner with a short walk to help balance blood sugar.

RECIPE CORNER: APPLE RINGS WITH PEANUT BUTTER AND TOPPINGS

Try this Fall Treat. It provides a little sweetness from the apple, but less sugar than eating the whole apple alone. The nuts and seeds provide healthy fats and protein to slow the absorption of sugar.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 medium crisp apple, such as Honeycrisp
- 3 TB natural peanut butter or nut butter

Optional toppings:

- Chopped nuts (almonds, pecans, peanuts or walnuts)
- Pumpkin seeds
- Unsweetened coconut flakes
- Chia or hemp seeds
- Cinnamon for sprinkling

PREPARATION:

1. Slice apples crosswise into ¼-inch thick rings. Use a small round cutter or the tip of a knife to remove the core and seeds, creating a "donut" shape.
2. Pat the apple slices dry, then spread a thin, even layer of peanut butter on each ring.
3. Sprinkle with your choice of toppings such as chopped nuts, coconut, or seeds. Add a light dusting of cinnamon if desired.

What steps will you take this November to prevent or reverse diabetes?



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