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ESSENTIALS FOR OPTIMIZING HEALTH: Cutting Sugar and Weight Loss

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More than anything else, cutting down on sugars and carbs is essential to your long-term health. Not only will this help shed unwanted pounds, it will help decrease your risk of getting diabetes by reducing your risk of insulin insensitivity or “metabolic syndrome x”, as well as newer research linking sugar intake as the true villain of cardiovascular disease, perhaps even more than cholesterol. Additionally, insulin *insensitivity* can cause high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high triglycerides, as well as make losing weight extremely difficult. When you decrease your sugar intake you are usually decreasing caloric intake, and decreased caloric intake has been shown to be associated with a longer life.

Does the thought of cutting down carbs seem impossible to you? Well, even if it does, it can be much easier than you think.

First I will give the needed advice for diet changes, as this is truly what must be implemented. Later I will discuss a supplement that can help once you have started these diet changes.

Start with cutting out anything and everything made with any flour. Bread, pasta, cous cous, cakes, pastries, corn chips, etc.- these are all made with flour, which is refined and therefore will have a higher

glycemic index. It doesn't matter if it is white flour, whole wheat flour, rice flour or millet flour- it is all a refined carb and the sugars from those carbs will be quickly and readily available to your body. By switching to whole grains for those same carbs, you will be slowing down the absorption of those sugars and doing yourself some good.

I like to give the example of making coffee with whole beans, from which you will only get a tan colored liquid. Once you grind the beans you will be able to get a deep rich coffee. Think of that color as the sugar in a grain. If you were to swallow a grain whole, say a wheat kernel, your body will only be able to extract sugar from that wheat kernel if it can break it down. For this, chewing is essential (and saliva has enzymes to help break down sugars) but you can see how some parts of the grains may slip through the chewing process and move on to the stomach for other processing, which will mean a delay for the sugar in that grain being processed and absorbed into your system. Contrast this with eating a grain that has been made into a flour. The flour is a little like a pre-chewed food. Just like the deep rich coffee from the finely ground beans, the sugars from this 'pre-chewed' grain will be readily available to your system regardless of your chewing, and those sugars will enter your system much faster than if you were eating that same amount as a whole grain. If you could swallow a piece of white bread without chewing, it wouldn't matter much. Once that bread is hydrated in the stomach with digestive juices, its sugars are easily extracted and quickly available to the system. But don't try that.

This would be a good time to say a little about gluten-free flours, as almond and coconut flours are readily available now in just about every grocery store. Almond and coconut flour are from their respective nuts, not grains, so they do not have the same sugar burden as grains do.

That's good and a great alternative, right?

Not necessarily.

What is being made with the almond flour? Is it a cake? If so, then it does not matter if you used a low carb flour like almond flour, as the added sugars for the cake negate that. Are these flours being used to make a gluten free bread? If so, then look at other ingredients like potato starch or various gums that are used to make the nut flour act like a glutinous wheat flour. Those gums and starches may also negate

the low carb aspect of the nut flour.

For the purpose of this discussion here, let's consider the grains that are made into flours as an unnecessary carbohydrate adding to your caloric intake. To consider them further as containing gluten or not is another aspect of health; specifically, food intolerances or allergies.

If you or someone you know must eat a gluten free diet, it is because of a reaction to the gluten that is in the grain, and not because of the carbohydrates in that grain. Gluten is a protein that holds the wheat flour together. Almond flour has no gluten so it needs starches and gums in order to stay together and mimic what the gluten does for wheat, if that is the intention. When you see these gluten-free breads and pastas, don't consider them healthier alternatives to wheat for instance. They are there for those people who can't eat gluten but would like a sandwich or brownie or slice of pizza, and great for them that they have that option. But unless you need to eat gluten-free, most of the time the gluten-free baked goods are absolutely not a healthier alternative than say actual wheat. This is because of the starches and gums that are added. For a lot of people these additives found in gluten-free baked goods can wreak havoc on the gastrointestinal system, so beware of this. I see it all the time with clients.

Besides eliminating foods made with flours, let's also take a look at the amount of sugars and carbohydrates you are eating to make sure they are not excessive for your situation. For instance, if you are diabetic or have been told that you have insulin insensitivity, then you may need to eliminate most grains, regardless of being in the form of a flour or a whole grain, as they will still register as carbs for you. If you are someone who is relatively healthy and just wants to start honing some aspects of your eating and lifestyle, then switching most flour consumption to the whole grains, may be enough.

A great rule of thumb to follow is to look at the food: does it look the way it grows in nature? You cannot tell what grain pasta was made from, or what grain the flour in a cake was made from. If so, then keep it out. This will mean you will be sticking to whole grains. Instead of having pasta, you can put that same lovely homemade sauce on whole

grain quinoa, or brown rice. It may seem minimal, but this one small step might end up doing a lot for you, especially if you have any issues with weight or insulin insensitivity.

In addition to the above, eliminate all sweet drinks and anything at all sweetened with any sugar, corn syrup, and even honey, maple syrup or agave nectar. Why? These are just extra calories your body can do without. All sweeteners (except stevia) can raise your blood glucose level, causing an insulin release, and increase your risk of insulin insensitivity. Some sweeteners bypass the insulin response, like fructose in fruit, but are still calories at the end of the day. So also be aware of fruit juices and take a look at the amount you are consuming.

This is not about going hungry. To the contrary. But you must eat correctly! A *balance* of protein, fats, fiber and less carbs will be your greatest help for eating a meal that satisfies your hunger so that you are not tempted to eat junk food later. Unbalanced meals may leave you looking for more food too soon, and have you grabbing for things you wish you hadn't.

You may have heard that it is best to eat little meals more often. This is not a hard-fast rule and you do not necessarily need to do this in order to be eating healthier. The premise of eating smaller meals and more of them is more for those who tend to overeat at a meal, or for those who tend to skip meals due to their busy schedule, then end up overeating at the next meal, or eating junk food snacks instead of a nutritious meal. If you are in fact fine with three or even two meals a day, then so be it, as long as you are not overeating at those meals, or for some, actually losing weight because you are not eating enough. The bottom line is the amount of calories you are consuming in a day. It won't matter much how many meals it takes to eat those calories if in fact your caloric intake is in excess of your daily needs. If you are eating five small meals and you are overweight, then you will want to look at what you are eating all day long and consider eating say three meals a day that are healthier and more balanced than grazing on unhealthy choices that add up to more calories than what you need for a day.

Whatever you are doing, keep track of a few days. You can find sites on-

line to enter your foods and quantities and get your caloric intake, or employ the help of a nutritionist or registered dietitian to do this for you and look into your diet with more scrutiny.

If you are overweight and snacking on things all day, then your caloric intake may be too much by the end of the day. Eating an extra 3500 calories per week will equate to gaining one pound, whereas cutting out 3500 calories per week will mean losing one pound (based on your daily caloric need which you can find on-line).

Do check out the snack list at the end. Not all things listed there may be indicated for your particular diet, so use your judgment.

So let's talk about some ideas for what to eat.

For breakfast you could start with beans or lentils, add veggies (experiment with spices for variety), and add an egg if you eat those, or a small amount of some left over protein from a dinner. You can also add some whole grain like quinoa. If your breakfast is essentially fat-free, you may add some olive oil as this will help satiate you so that you don't go grabbing for a cookie at 10am. If you were told you have to cut your cholesterol intake and you like eggs, consider using only egg whites instead of whole eggs as a protein source for your breakfast.

For lunch have a large salad. You can add some protein like a can of sardines (avoid tuna due to mercury) or beans and lentils. Add veggies like broccoli (when it is raw it has some great cancer-fighting compounds), and instead of bread with that salad, add some brown rice or quinoa. Stay away from bottled salad dressings with all of their cheap oils, gums, starches and added flavorings. Go straight for the best oils (extra virgin olive, or good quality nut and seed oils) with any vinegar or lemon or lime.

Dinner: look at your plate and make half of it veggies like broccoli, asparagus, green beans, kale, collards, Brussels sprouts, etc.

-have brown rice and quinoa instead of potatoes, bread, pasta

-a good rule of thumb is 3 ounces of protein with any meal. This lower amount of protein will be easily metabolized by your system. Having a little more will not be a problem for most, but do eat more veggies (and

lettuce does not count as a veggie here!)

Now it is time to consider where you are in regards to your sugar cravings. Can you do these diet changes discussed above, or will cutting out the cakes and pizza be too challenging? Can you change your diet cold-turkey and cut out those carbs, or do you feel you need a little help because your sugar cravings are just too strong? If so, there may be help.

Supplementing your diet with a particular form of chromium, known as “GTF Chromium” (Glucose Tolerance Factor: chromium polynicotinate) may help greatly. It helps your body stabilize glucose and insulin levels so you won't crave those carbs as much. Taking 200-600 mcg of GTF Chromium once to twice per day, with or without food, may help curb sugar cravings. Once your sugar cravings subside in a few days to a week, discontinue it and start back up on it temporarily if your cravings return. Supplementing with GTF Chromium is essential for some people when trying to wean off of alcohol consumption as well.

(please note that I am not recommending chromium picolinate or any other form of chromium other than chromium *polynicotinate*). This is something that is safe for most to use temporarily with the consent of your doctor. There are many more things available from nutrients, herbs and homeopathic medicines, but these are best discussed with a naturopathic physician to ensure you are on the best medicine for your situation and health goals.

Let me say this please: this is not a magic bullet. You must first be committed to making the changes needed to your diet. You cannot start taking chromium while trying to avoid the ice cream in the freezer or cake in the cupboard. Get all of those things out of your home.

Go forward with making these important dietary changes and start your insurance policy for a healthier and longer life!

What you put into your body is your first step toward a healthier future. This includes maintaining the health that you have today in order to ensure your future lifestyle and happiness. As your body ages and changes, so must you with your behaviors with food. As we age most of us need to eat less while optimizing that food for nutrients. Making

changes to your diet is essential work that will pay off for decades. With all my clients I inevitably look at food and diet. For those who come to me who believe that they are already eating fairly healthy, I still take a look at diet as often there is something that could be adjusted, or a food intolerance or allergy to look into if health is off-balance. Regardless, it is always better for you to start this process yourself, as your food can be your medicine, but also your poison.

When you need more specific guidance for acute or chronic conditions I can help with implementing specific nutrients, herbal medicines or homeopathic medicines that may help you get your health back on track. For others, simply determining what dietary supplements would be best to take for preserving your health for the many years to come will be enough. Either way, for any of your health needs, I am available to you.

In health and peace,
Paul Gannon, N.D.

LOW CARB SNACK LIST

The key here is to eat and snack LOW on the GLYCEMIC INDEX list...

Nuts and seeds: *cashews, filberts, brazil, almonds, sunflower, flax, sesame, hemp*
(notice peanuts are not part of this list: they can have 'aflotoxin', a powerful carcinogenic fungus)

This includes 'butters' of any of these. Spread any **nut butters** on: apples, celery, carrots, jicama, or any other fruit or veggie that seems appealing to you.

If convenient and you are purchasing certified 'raw' nuts, then they are best soaked overnight, as this helps hydrate and turn-on the enzymes, making them easier to digest- once soaked you can store them in the refrigerator, or eat within a day.

If you feel a certain nut does not sit right with your digestion, try a different one. Some people do great with walnuts and pecans while they cannot tolerate pistachios... Start to observe how you feel from eating certain foods.

Fresh fruits: *in season and local is always best.* (apples and pears are considered 'in season' all winter long, as nature designed them to store)

Try to avoid fruit juices due to the high sugar (ie: *four* oranges in *one* glass of OJ), and eat dried fruits sparingly (ie, an entire bunch of grapes posing as an innocent handful of raisins)...do feel free to soak dried fruits overnight- this will plump them up, but discard the

liquid, as it is mostly sugar...if you do snack on dried fruits, chew them well and eat nuts with them to add some good fats and nutrients.

Veggies: buy a bunch, come home, wash and cut everything, and store in an OPEN bag in the fridge (otherwise they rot faster).

Grab a handful anytime you wish, easy!

-Broccoli, cauliflower, zucchini, jicama, peppers, scallions, sugar snap or snow peas, etc.

Hummus, or any bean dip for that matter...the very best snacks are fresh veggies, so this can embellish that fresh raw broccoli, carrots, celery, jicama, etc.

Salads: *washed and ready to go*...top with a good quality cold pressed olive or nut oil and add lime, lemon or vinegar.

Meat/eggs: sardines are excellent, (way better than tuna which is high in mercury and something I advise against eating) either packed in water, sunflower or olive oil (never eat cottonseed oil as it is not a food and is one of the most heavily sprayed crops).

Whole sardines have CoQ10 and good omega 3's fatty acids, as if they have the soft bones then you benefit from some calcium and bone building nutrients as well.

Other options here that can serve as a great snack that doesn't mess with your blood sugar are hard boiled eggs, or a few bites of any meat

Rice crackers and rice cakes: *be sure to have a spread like a bean dip, hummus or pesto ready to go on these*, as otherwise these can have too high of a glycemic index (which is the sugar entering your blood very quickly). The added fat, protein and fiber, say of a bean spread like hummus can slow that down.

Protein shakes: *can serve as a snack or a meal replacement for weight loss*

There are many protein powders to mix in a smoothie: rice and pea protein powders, soy, hemp, egg white, and various qualities of whey protein (from basic inexpensive on up to organic and having minimal processing with more immunoglobulins present). Some are enhanced with nutritional factors like vitamins and minerals (although I am rarely impressed by the quality of such nutrients added to any protein powders or drinks, and I recommend doing without those sometimes dangerous fortifications and working with a naturopathic physician to target what nutrients are best for you).

Just remember that your smoothie should not have much of any sweet juices added such as apple, orange or carrot- adding berries and non-sweet veggies will keep the sugars lower. Some like to add medium chain triglyceride oil (MCT oil) for energy and fat and this is fine, as is olive oil, coconut oil (if not intolerant to it), fish oil, fresh avocado, etc.

Pickles, sauerkraut, olives, dulse (a sea vegetable, aka seaweed! Delicious and ready to eat as is)...for that salty tooth...but use in moderation as these can have high salt

Beans, lentils and peas can be added to any snack or meal as these have fiber and some protein and can actually help with stabilizing blood glucose despite their carbohydrate content.

If a favorite of yours is not on here, please let me know.

And chew well: the most important part of eating so that you get the nutrients from your food!