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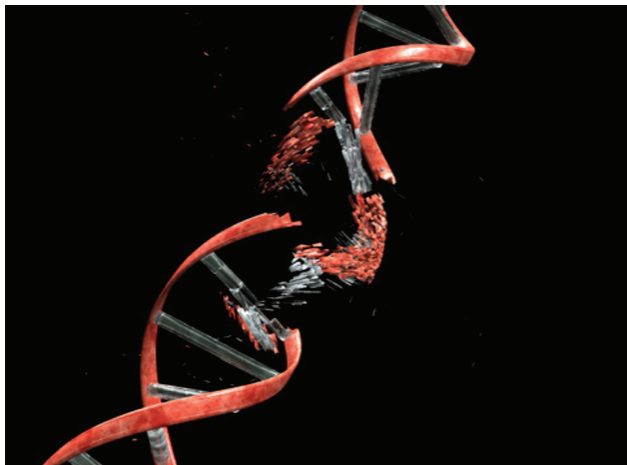
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### The Great Diabetes Debate: Genetics versus Lifestyle

Why "it runs in the family" may not apply as the focus on diabetes shifts toward prevention.



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A spoonful of sugar makes the reality go down in a not-so-delightful way. No, you can't catch diabetes; it doesn't hold the impressive infectious characteristics of HIV or tuberculosis. But yet, the disease extends through the United States in epidemic proportions, with diabetes as the sixth leading cause of death on U.S. death certificates in 2006 (1). In 2007, the American Diabetes Association estimated that 23.6 million children and adults in the United States—7.8% of the population—have diabetes, with numbers probably rising in the last few years (2).

Diabetes is a disease in which the body has a shortage of or a decreased ability to use insulin, a hormone that allows glucose (sugar) to enter cells and be converted to energy. When this is not controlled, glucose and fats remain in the blood and begin to damage vital organs. Frederic J. Vagnini, M.D., FACS, author and consultant to Enzymatic Therapy, Green Bay, WI, says: "Diabetes is a devastating disease. It affects all organs and cells of the body because of oxidative damage, inflammation, glycosylation, and the high-glucose molecules causing glucose toxicity." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirms that diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness, kidney failure and nontraumatic lower-extremity amputations among adults (1).

But many Americans still don't give diabetes the attention or concern that its results merit. Perhaps this is because in place of the dramatic pathogens we crave in our favorite medical television shows and books is

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the infectious nature of poor health education. Instead of combating plagues, we are combating a mindset of complacency about health. Many people haven't been properly educated about their health, while others still chalk up their diabetes to: "It runs in the family." However, research shows that while people may inherit a susceptibility to diabetes, they do not inherit the disease itself—making healthy choices and prevention more important than ever.

Ellen Kamhi, Ph.D., R.N., author and professional herbalist for Nature's Answer, Hauppauge, NY, says, "Although genetics may predispose some people to sugar imbalances and insulin resistance, other factors which contribute to this condition play a far greater role. These include incorrect dietary choices, food allergies, an underactive thyroid, emotional influences and a sedentary lifestyle."

#### Syndrome X Marks a Troubled Spot

Marcus Laux, N.D., author and educator, made this crucial point during a seminar at the 2010 Natural Products Expo West in Anaheim, CA: "75% of our longevity is determined by our choices; 25% is up to genetics" (3). With this in mind, diabetes does not just appear. It is the result of a gradual process of several stages of symptoms that can be addressed and reversed when the right dietary and lifestyle choices are made.

There are many blaring signs on the road to diabetes signaling the need for change. A few of these signals include: high triglycerides, low HDL cholesterol and high LDL cholesterol, elevated blood pressure, insulin resistance or glucose intolerance and a pro-inflammatory state (e.g., elevated C-reactive protein in the blood). Any person with several of these factors is considered to have metabolic syndrome, also known as insulin resistance syndrome or Syndrome X. Despite the elusive sound of its name, over 50 million Americans have this syndrome (4), which is a dire warning of the development of prediabetes and further cardiovascular and endocrine disorders.

The above factors must be confirmed through medical testing, which, unfortunately, may be deterring some people from taking action. However, says James Perin, lead scientific advisor for ReserveAge Organics, Gainesville, FL, there are several symptoms that should give people serious clues of a possible metabolic disorder:

- Being overweight, especially excessive fat in and around the abdomen.
- Frequent urination and fluid intake.
- Frequent illness or infection (bacteria love glucose).
- Tingling in the hands and feet.
- Deteriorating eyesight.

Mood changes related to food and eating is also an indicator of a metabolic or blood sugar disorder (see sidebar, "Quiz: Do You Have a Problem with Sugar?").

Importantly, consumers need to get this message, says Steve Holtby, president and CEO of Soft Gel Technologies, Inc., Los Angeles, CA: "For those with metabolic syndrome, a diagnosis does not mean they are destined for diabetes or heart disease. Rather it is an opportunity for patients to intervene to delay the onset of diabetes, which will also lower their risk for other complications such as coronary heart disease or stroke."

One of the most obvious ways do this is to address an increasing waist-to-hip ratio (i.e., an increase in abdominal fat). Michael T. Murray, N.D., director of product development and education for Natural Factors, Everett, WA, advises, "Weight loss, specifically the loss of visceral adipose tissue, is the most critical goal in the prevention of the progression from prediabetes to diabetes." However, it is important to note that many people who are told they must lose weight to reverse their impending diabetes may come looking for that "magic bullet" weight-loss pill as their answer. Be prepared to make the distinction to customers about healthy weight loss, and which natural products may truly benefit them, as well as steering them clear of products that contain caffeine or other stimulants that may actually make blood sugar control more difficult.



#### Quiz: Do You Have a Problem With Sugar?

Ellen Kamhi, Ph.D., R.N., of Nature's Answer presents some questions to discover if blood sugar imbalance is a problem. The inability to manage weight is often related to an insulin or sugar imbalance. Ask yourself and your customers these questions:

- Do I eat when nervous?
- Am I intensely hungry between meals?
- Am I irritable before meals?
- Do I feel a little shaky when hungry?
- Does my fatigue disappear after eating?
- Do I feel faint or have heart palpitations if meals are delayed?
- Do I get afternoon headaches?
- Do I crave coffee or candy in the afternoon because I feel very tired?
- Do I regularly have intense cravings for sweets or snack foods?

If your answer is "yes" to three or more of these questions, a blood sugar imbalance is probably a factor in your weight control issues. The next step may be to figure out your sugar-eating habits.

According to Jacob Teitelbaum, M.D., author of *Best Sugar Addiction Now!*, you may fall into one of the following sugar addict categories:

**Type 1: Sugar as an Energy Loan Shark.** You are chronically exhausted and hooked on quick hits of caffeine and sugar.

**Type 2: "Feed Me Now or I'll Kill You."** Life's stress exhausts your adrenal glands.

**Type 3: The Happy Ho-Ho Hunter.** Your sugar cravings are caused by yeast/candida overgrowth.

**Type 4: Depressed and Craving Carbs.** Sugar cravings are caused by low mood, your period, menopause or andropause.

Based on which type you or your customers are, it will be easier to formulate a focused plan for attaining blood sugar health.

#### Reference

J. Teitelbaum, *Best Sugar Addiction Now!* (Fair Winds Press, Beverly, MA, 2010).

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