

# Life's Essential 8: Reduce Blood Sugar

Hi, I'm Cindy. A lot of people don't know the important facts about blood sugar or blood glucose. To many of us the term "high blood sugar" only makes us think of candy and cavities.... but really, there's a lot more to blood sugar control than capping your sweet tooth.

Years ago, during my pregnancies, I had gestational diabetes. And, more recently, my brother developed Type 2 diabetes. Every time we eat together I notice how hard he works to manage his insulin. It's difficult.

And although my own health factors look good, blood sugar is the category where I have the least margin. So between genetics and my own heart score, I know this area needs my attention.

Now, if you're like me, you've probably experienced periods of lower energy at predictable times of the day. I used to crash in the mid-afternoon and then grab a candy bar or load up on sugary cereal, thinking I was "boosting my energy"

Instead of a sugar jolt, what we really need is a slow and steady supply of glucose (or blood sugar) from a variety of healthy foods which help you avoid the crazy see-saw ride of blood sugar highs and lows.

Here is how your nutrition choices can help you enjoy a steady supply of energy all day long. You see, your digestion eventually turns all carbohydrates into sugar or glucose which is then carried throughout your bloodstream.

The complex carbohydrates like whole-wheat breads and grains, and fruits and vegetables take longer to digest, helping to keep your energy supply steady.

And simple sugars, like sweets, donuts, and white bread are very quickly converted into glucose, which can cause your body to call for extra surges of a hormone, insulin, to help regulate the energy supply. If you have kids, start teaching them the skills for choosing healthy foods and why it's important to say no to junk foods that will cause an unhealthy spike in blood sugar.

High blood sugar encourages the growth of plaque in your arteries. While this is bad on its own, problems can become much worse when your body gets resistant to insulin or you simply stop making insulin altogether. This condition, known as diabetes, is treatable, but very dangerous, and can often lead to heart disease and stroke.

Even if you don't have diabetes, you need to know your blood sugar level. Be sure to get a fasting blood sugar level test at least every three years, because controlling glucose is an important part of stopping heart disease before it starts.

If your blood sugar level is higher than the ideal, here's what you can do to make a positive difference in your life and health. I've seen my own numbers come down with these simple choices.

First, I make good food choices. Choose a good balance of nutritious foods that take time to convert into glucose. It's a good idea to eat small portions and include foods like oats, granola, pears, oranges, peas, and beans, all of which are a great source of complex carbs. Drinking enough water can also help your lower your blood sugar.

Second, I'm very committed to my physical activity routine. Physical activity breaks down carbs more quickly,

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which helps get them out of the bloodstream and lowers the sugars. For diabetic individuals, exercise is often just as essential as medication because it is so effective at blood sugar regulation.

And third, I make sure that I maintain a healthy weight. If you are overweight, even losing as few as ten pounds can go a long way toward helping your blood sugars stay controlled.

So by investing energy in improving your blood sugars, you are likely to improve your weight and nutrition, too.

Remember to focus on your goal: feeling your best and living a healthy life. By taking small steps one day at a time, one meal at a time, and one walk at a time, you *will* start to notice a difference in your energy level, your blood sugar, and your sense of well-being as you choose good health.