6 Natural Remedies to Help Manage Diabetes

by COLLEEN KELLY

Natural Ways to Treat Diabetes

As a certified diabetes educator (CDE), when a patient asks me for natural ways to manage diabetes, I have to break it to them gently.

The most natural way to manage your diabetes is diet and exercise. Which, coincidentally, is what you should be doing anyway, according to the *Standards of Medical Care in Diabetes – 2018.*

The *Standards of Medical Care* is updated yearly. The 2018 version didn't change much from the 2017 version, in terms of nutrition therapy and exercise.

Nutrition Therapy

Individuals with diabetes who have a referral for medical nutrition therapy (MNT) with a registered dietitian (RD) can see an A1C reduction of 1.0-1.9% in those with type 1 diabetes and 0.3-2% in those with type 2 diabetes – a huge reduction, regardless of the type of diabetes!

The goals of MNT are multifaceted, but part of the goal is to attain glycemic, blood pressure, and lipid goals, as well as body weight goals, while preventing complications, and promoting the enjoyment of the "diet."

The *Standards of Medical Care* do not outline a specific diet for everyone with diabetes, because they realize that everyone is different, with complex needs; this is due to activity levels, current health status, as well as health history and other comorbidities.

Exercise

The *Standards of Medical Care* outline specific exercise recommendations based on age.

- Children with prediabetes, type 1 diabetes, or type 2 diabetes are recommended to engage in 60 minutes of exercise daily, as well as muscle- and bone-strengthening exercise 3 days per week.
- Most adults with type 1 and type 2 diabetes should exercise for 150 minutes per week, spread out over at least 3 days per week. 75 minutes per week may be sufficient for younger and physically fit people. 2-3 sessions of muscle- and bone-strengthening exercise should be added to the regime.
- All adults should reduce sedentary time. Prolonged sitting should be interrupted every 30 minutes.

Physical activity is thought to reduce complications, as well as improve blood glucose control, assist with weight loss, and promote feelings of well-being.

What About Other "Natural" Treatments?

If you have type 1 diabetes, you must understand that insulin is an absolute requirement for survival. Your pancreas does not make insulin, which means that without supplementation with insulin, your blood glucose levels will get life-threateningly high.

If you have type 2 diabetes, there are a myriad of treatment options – and they are dependent on how high your blood glucose levels are. This often leads to people questioning whether an alternative supplement would suffice.

There are several supplements that are sometimes recommended (or at least, you may see on a Google search) that *may* have glucose-lowering potential.

Aloe Vera

Aloe vera is most often used topically to treat a variety of dermatologic conditions. However, it has also been studied as a means of treating high blood sugar.

In fact, in the Arabian peninsula, it is the traditional treatment for diabetes. It is thought that the pulp of the plant may have hypoglycemic effects by stimulating the beta cells of the pancreas.

According to the ADA, there have been two studies that researched the effect of aloe vera, ingested orally as a juice. The study reported a reduction in fasting blood glucose levels. However, "…these studies lacked sufficient details in reporting, including study design and results, leading to inconclusive evidence."

It is also important to note that if you do choose to trial aloe vera as a treatment for your diabetes, you must know how to harvest it correctly, or obtain it from a reputable source. Aloe obtained from the inner lining of the leaf, aloe latex, can have a laxative effect.

Momordica Charantia

Momordica charantia, also commonly known as *bitter melon*, is a tropical vegetable grown in South America, Africa, and Asia. It is also known as "vegetable insulin."

Bitter melon is thought to reduce blood sugar levels by reducing hepatic glucose production (or the liver's glucose production), as well as several other complex mechanisms. However, clinical trials are lacking in the correct design to determine if the bitter melon is actually effective.

Fenugreek

Fenugreek is a traditional flavoring in Indian food. It is also used as a treatment for diabetes in China and India. It is thought to increase insulin secretion from the pancreas, as well as decrease carbohydrate absorption. Studies have been positive, but like other studies with alternative medicine, they have lacked quality in determining effectiveness.

Cinnamon

Cinnamon is an extremely popular supplement for treating type 2 diabetes. The jury is out as to whether it is effective.

There have been quite a few research studies regarding its use in lowering glucose levels. Mayo Clinic notes that the American Diabetes Association has completely dismissed it as a viable treatment option for diabetes, whereas other studies are considering it as a possible contender for glucose management.

For example, several small studies showed a reduction in glucose levels. Researchers speculate that the reduction is most likely due to a decrease in insulin resistance. Some studies even found that cinnamon cut lipid levels!

The Bottom Line…

The most effective natural treatment for diabetes is seeking assistance with a better diet, and getting plenty of exercise.

If you're seeking alternative therapies, do your research, and know that research hasn't necessarily proved that anything is effective. Lastly, if you choose to add a supplement to your regimen, please speak with your physician or a pharmacist, to ensure that it is safe for you to take.