

# Wellness

## REVIEW

### Keeping Healthy in the Holidays

#### The Return of the Silly Season

Each year the seasonal festivities pose a challenge to sustaining your health. You may give in to cravings for refined carbohydrates, sugary treats and alcohol – waking up in the New Year with a metabolic ‘hangover’ of weight gain and fatigue caused by erratic blood glucose (sugar) levels. However, the holiday period doesn’t mean your health has to come undone providing you put in place some simple strategies, including balancing your blood glucose and insulin levels.

#### Blood Glucose vs. Insulin

Following each meal your body releases the hormone insulin in response to rising blood glucose levels. Insulin is like a key that opens up the locks on your body’s cells so that glucose can get inside and be used for energy. However, for some people, ongoing exposure to sugary treats and starchy carbohydrates can have a negative effect on this mechanism leading to an inefficient uptake of glucose into the cell. At this point you may be experiencing ‘insulin resistance’ with the accompanying fatigue, weight gain, and worsening of your cravings as your cells keep seeking energy even though you are eating regularly. And too much glucose remaining in the bloodstream is undesirable as it can lead to health complications over time. Fortunately, your Practitioner can recommend herbs and nutrients that can curb cravings and improve your cells’ sensitivity to insulin once more.

#### Curb those Cravings!

Nature has solutions to help improve insulin sensitivity and assist your body to burn its ‘fuel’ more efficiently. For example, cocoa contains compounds called polyphenols that at therapeutic levels help your cells switch from burning carbohydrates to burning more efficient fats for fuel. Not only does that create much-needed energy but can help you lose those extra kilos in the process! In addition, the Ayurvedic herb gymnema has traditionally been used to quell sugar cravings, whilst cinnamon enhances your body’s glucose metabolism capability. The nutrient chromium also helps reduce carbohydrate cravings, whilst magnesium rapidly improves your cells’ sensitivity to insulin, further helping to raise energy levels. Your Practitioner can recommend a combination of these herbs and nutrients to help you control your cravings, burn more fat and increase your energy levels as your cells receive the fuel they require.

#### “The Microbes Made Me Eat It!”

Did you know cravings may also be caused by microbial imbalance in your gut? Your gut microbes (or ‘microbiota’) play an essential role in good digestion, however they need to be kept in balance by supporting the beneficial types or ‘strains’ of bacteria living there. Foods high in dietary fibre are considered ‘prebiotics’, and feed the beneficial bacteria population therefore should be consumed regularly. However, it is not uncommon to need to use a specific probiotic to help optimise or maintain the beneficial strains living within your gut, particularly if you are craving sugary or processed foods. Your Practitioner can recommend a specific probiotic to suit your health needs, and help get those cravings under control!

#### Don’t Ditch the Exercise

It’s tempting to leave exercise on the back burner during the holiday season but maintaining exercise is like buying an insurance policy against those dietary slip-ups. Exercise itself is a rapid and effective means of regulating blood glucose levels, whilst maintaining a healthy muscle mass helps you burn fats more efficiently. Exercise also benefits your gut microbiota by promoting diversity amongst the beneficial bacterial strains, which is associated with improved insulin sensitivity.

#### Party Hacks

Although some strategic supplements can help you manage your cravings, the end of year functions still need navigating! Keep your blood glucose levels more balanced by keeping a few simple party rules in mind:

- Opt for a protein snack such as a chicken drumstick instead of a starchy party pie; and reach for the crudities with avocado or humus dips instead of breadsticks. This helps keep you fuller for longer and reduces cravings;
- Drink a mineral water for every alcoholic drink. This helps you remain hydrated and reduces the poor food choices that can accompany overindulging with alcohol; and
- Choose ‘clean’ spirits such as vodka with soda water over sparkling wines and beers, as these have a high sugar content; and avoid sugary mixers in spirits or on their own.



#### Have your Cake and Eat It (Just a Small Piece!)

The advent of the silly season doesn’t mean you have to ‘fall off the wagon’ when it comes to your health. Reigning in cravings and balancing blood glucose levels are the key to remaining in control and not overindulging, so speak to your Practitioner today about strategies to support you and your ongoing health now and into the New Year.

**Talk to your Practitioner today about keeping healthy during the holidays.**