

Six Natural Weapons to Fight Diabetes

We often hear about avoiding the foods and beverages that can raise our risk of developing diabetes such as alcohol, fast food, processed meats, high-sugar foods, soft drinks and so on. But according to the October 2006 issue of Shape magazine, here are six things you should add to your diet to arm your body's defenses in this battle:

1. Chromium. This mineral helps your body use insulin more efficiently and may also reduce fat around your belly that increases the risk of developing diabetes. Although it can be absorbed by our bodies when we eat foods such as broccoli, green beans and whole-wheat bread, most of us don't consume enough. Richard Anderson, Ph.D., nutritional chemist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), recommends taking supplements that contain chromium picolinate or chromium histidine. (Always check with your doctor first, especially if you have been diagnosed as diabetic or pre-diabetic.)

2. Magnesium. Studies show that eating a diet rich in magnesium can reduce a woman's risk of developing diabetes by 48 percent; likewise, a low-magnesium diet more than triples the risk. You can increase your intake of magnesium by eating foods such as spinach, whole-wheat breads, Brazil nuts and baked halibut. Supplements are also available.

3. Whole grains. In addition to being high in chromium and magnesium, whole grains contain fiber, which helps you eat less and control your weight. The slower digestion they cause helps to regulate your blood sugar levels as well. Eating whole grains can reduce your risk of developing diabetes by 22 percent, according to David Jacobs, Ph.D., of the University of Minnesota. Good sources are oatmeal, whole-grain breads and brown rice.

4. Coffee. More and more studies are showing that drinking coffee helps reduce the risk of developing diabetes. In a study cited in Diabetes Care, women who drank one cup of coffee per day lowered their risk of type 2 diabetes by 13 percent; those who drank two cups a day reduced their risk by 42 percent.

5. Cinnamon. During an experiment with apple pie, Anderson (of the USDA) discovered that cinnamon lowers blood sugar levels by as much as 29 percent. Add it to your oatmeal or whole-wheat toast.

6. Vitamin D. Studies have found that people with low levels of vitamin D in their blood don't produce insulin properly or respond normally to it. Exposing your skin to about 10 minutes of sunlight every day can help raise your level of vitamin D, as well as consuming milk, orange juice and other food products fortified with the vitamin.