On Nutrition: by Helayne Waldman, Ed.D., N.E.

Slow and Steady Still Wins the Race

The hare was once boasting of his speed before the other animals. "I have never yet been beaten," said he, "when I put forth my full speed. I challenge anyone here to race with me."

The tortoise said quietly, "I accept your challenge." And so the race began.

And we all know what happened at the end.

The tortoise worked his way to the finish line with grace and patience, while the hare precociously burned out. No doubt the hare lived on a diet high in sugar and refined carbohydrates.

Unfortunately, many years of media hype have resulted in too many people who thought they were doing themselves a world of good by eating a lowfat diet when in fact they were actually eating a high sugar diet. What does this mean? If you think of a carbohydrate as a collection of sugar molecules joined in a particular pattern, you're on the right track. In order to use these carbs as energy, the body must first break them down into simple sugars. The speed at which our body does this determines in large measure how much weight we gain or don't gain from a particular diet or food over time. That's because the simpler the carbohydrate, the faster it converts to sugar. The faster it converts to sugar, the more quickly it gets into our bloodstream. Our bloodstream can only handle so much sugar

(or glucose) before it calls out the troops to lower the elevated glucose level. The troops in this case come charging out of the pancreas in the form of insulin, which quickly spreads throughout the bloodstream to quell the sugar spike.

So, after the ingestion of a donut, bagel, or 7 up, our blood sugar shoots up, and a surge of insulin brings it back down. We feel energetic, even manic – then we feel exhausted.
While insulin certainly saves the day in the all too frequent occurrence of this type of sugar "crisis", we are definitely not looking to keep our insulin levels high for long periods of time. When we do, our livers become sluggish, our triglyceride and cholesterol soar, and the pounds pack on. What's more, over time such crisis management techniques will take their toll on our endocrine system, wearing out our pancreas and adrenal glands, leaving our metabolism exhausted and inefficient.

In the extreme case, the constant spikes in blood sugar will ultimately overwhelm the body's ability to self-regulate, and you become insulin resistant. When this happens, your cells become less sensitive to the effects of insulin. So while your pancreas may be working like a beaver to keep your blood sugar level constant, its efforts become continuously less effective. You gain weight around your midsection, your blood lipids rise, and your blood pressure creeps up as well. If the condition is not dealt with aggressively, you will eventually move on to full blown diabetes. Skeptics need only check out a recent study from Harvard to discover that folks who regularly consume soda pop, no slouch in the sugar department, are 80% more likely to develop diabetes than those who don't.

The trick is not avoiding carbs altogether as some diet plans would advocate, but avoiding the peaks and valleys of major blood sugar disruptions. One way to do this is to get to know the glycemic index.

The glycemic index predicts how quickly your blood sugar will rise after eating a specific amount of a food. For example, the glycemic index of sugar is 100, as high as it gets. A French baguette comes close, with a 95 on the index while whole grain bread averages about 50. While some fruits like dates and pineapples are fairly high on the glycemic index, apples and peaches are quite low.

If it tastes light and sweet, it is probably a high glycemic

food. But not always. Take a stroll to www.glycemicindex.com, click on the "GI Database" tab and type in "cherries." You'll see that sweet, juicy Canadian cherries sport a low glycemic index of 22. Who says staying healthy can't be a bowl full of cherries?

Now, as you might have already guessed, fibrous vegetables, legumes and nuts are broken down and absorbed very slowly by the body, supplying a continual stream of energy, as opposed to that spiky "sugar high." So are the "good" fats like olive, grapeseed and flax oils, as well as quality sources of protein like organic eggs, cold water fish and cage-free, organic fowl, as well as dark, complex carbohydrates like brown rice, buckwheat, quinoa or barley. Keeping your blood sugar stable with a consistent supply of these staples is your goal.

Remember, steady state energy helps keep you calm, focused and constant. And it gets you over the finish line in good shape. Just like the tortoise.

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