

Positive response to COVID-19: Reduce insulin resistance! April 2020



Miles Hassell MD and David Ellis MD (that's Providence St. Vincent Medical Center behind them) are available for office visits, house calls, telephone consults, even curbside consults. If you need a doctor or have questions about medical issues, call the office at 503.291.1777; our team will help schedule the best option for your situation.

The positive response to COVID-19: Use critical thinking to reduce your risk

What does your antiviral toolbox look like? Does it include red meat, salmon, raw nuts, mushrooms and chard? A jump rope? A bathtub for deep hot baths? A waist-loss plan? Do these seem nutty? Read on!

Most of us are concerned about the potential health and economic consequences of COVID-19. However, there are many positive responses we can apply in our daily lives to help (1) avoid serious illness from the virus, (2) keep our feet solidly planted in reason rather than fear, and (3) be better prepared for fighting not only this pandemic, but *any* health crisis that might come along. An example of what we mean by rational thought is this: The vast majority of people who are exposed to the COVID-19 virus do not get a serious illness, and presumably get some degree of persistent immune protection. A rational response would be: "What tools do I have to strengthen my immunity enough to fight off COVID-19?" (For a detailed plan and helpful tips, check out the resources in the box on the next page.)

What does insulin resistance have to do with COVID-19, and what should we do about it?

The main risk factors for life-threatening COVID-19-related illness include chronic kidney disease, heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. For each of these conditions, insulin resistance dominates as a major

contributing cause. For example, most cases of end-stage kidney failure in the U.S. are related to type 2 diabetes and hypertension, which are independently associated with insulin resistance. (Of course, there are risks for serious viral illness that have less connection to insulin resistance, such as lung disease and cancer.)

What is insulin resistance, and do you have it?

Insulin resistance describes a hormonal dysregulation which causes higher-than-normal levels of insulin to be produced in order to direct glucose (the main source of energy that allows our bodies to operate) into our cells, which gradually become more sluggish in their response to the insulin. Insulin resistance, prediabetes, metabolic syndrome, and type 2 diabetes are overlapping diagnoses that raise our risk of premature death, heart disease, stroke, cancer, and dementia. If you have two or three of the following risk factors, you likely have insulin resistance and higher COVID-19-related risk:

1. Fasting blood sugar greater than 100 mg/dl ("prediabetes") or being treated for high blood sugar
2. Waistline greater than 35 inches for women and 40 inches for men; less for small framed people
3. Blood pressure greater than 135/85, or taking blood pressure medication
4. Triglycerides greater than 150 mg/dl
5. HDL ("good" cholesterol) lower than 40 mg/dl for men and 50 mg/dl for women

If we reverse insulin resistance, do we lower our risk of serious COVID-19 illness?

Although no studies have specifically addressed this question, we do know that the lifestyle choices that reverse insulin resistance are associated with better immunity, reversal of type 2 diabetes and pre-diabetes, better blood pressure, and a lower risk of respiratory illness as well as cancer, stroke, and kidney and heart disease. It would be reasonable to tackle insulin resistance as a starting point to lower health risks over the next few weeks as well as for the long term.

How do we reverse insulin resistance and the metabolic syndrome in our practice?

Reversing this condition can be rapid, measurable in days or weeks, depending on how seriously people apply the following multi-level approach: (page numbers refer to *Good Food, Great Medicine*, 4th edition.)

- **Adopt a daily vigorous exercise habit** (pages 70-74)

- **Reduce or control waistline** (pages 78-79)
- **Prepare your own food** from scratch (page 10)
- **Reduce or eliminate rapidly metabolized carbohydrates** such as sweets, sweet drinks, juices, white rice, commercial breakfast cereal, and anything made with refined flour, including bread, pasta, and crackers (pages 59-66)
- **Eat an omnivorous whole food Mediterranean-style diet** emphasizing vegetables, whole fruit, whole grains, beans/lentils, and good fat (page 35)
- **Include high quality protein** like oil-rich fish (salmon, tuna, sardines, etc) as well as unprocessed meat, poultry, and eggs (pages 43-46)
- **Include probiotic foods** such as traditionally-made sauerkraut and cultured dairy, like plain unsweetened yogurt and kefir (pages 47-49)

Do nutritional supplements have a role?

Nutritional supplements are often inappropriately recommended as being protective against influenza viruses in general and against COVID-19 specifically. You can schedule a telephone consult to discuss supplements that may be relevant to your situation, from Vitamin A to zinc: call our office at 503.291.1777. For an online resource that allows you to fact-check nutritional supplement claims, consider joining ConsumerLab.com.

Toolbox for reversing insulin resistance

Here are five tools to get started:

1. **Read the first 110 pages of *Good Food, Great Medicine*** (4th edition), especially the 14-step *Risk Reduction Action Plan* beginning on page 90.
2. **Download *An Evidence-based Guide to Successful Waist Loss and Preventing or Reversing Insulin Resistance and Type 2 Diabetes* handout on the resources tab @ goodfoodgreatmedicine.com.** Another good resource is *Fat is Good, Bagels are Bad - some (Mediterranean) principles to eat by*.
3. **Sign up for our July class series** (see *Speaking events* in next column).
4. **Schedule a consultation** with Dr. Hassell or Dr. Ellis to explore and evaluate your own health trajectory, and develop a treatment plan.
5. **Enroll in a 1-year or 6 month health transformation program**, a one-on-one doctor-patient partnership providing support, accountability, & dietary counsel.

Have concerns about flu symptoms and your immune system? You may find it helpful to read our handouts [Concerned about coronavirus?](#) and [Cold and Flu at \[goodfoodgreatmedicine.com\]\(http://goodfoodgreatmedicine.com\)](#) as well as Dr. Hassell's video COVID-19 & insulin resistance (youtu.be/iwidMWwniqM). Also see pages 22-23 in *Good Food, Great Medicine* (4th edition) and the 14-step plan on pages 90-110.

Smooth Butternut Bisque

This simple soup can be made from scratch very quickly, and takes kindly to experiments in the field of flavors, especially the spices. Butternut is the most user-friendly of the squash family, but you can use all kinds of squash, chopped raw, leftover or fresh-cooked, roasted or steamed. The tomato juice and subtle heat of Tabasco, curry, and ginger counter the sweetness of the squash and onions nicely.

(Makes 8–10 cups)

4 cups uncooked butternut squash, chopped and steamed until tender, about 30 minutes
-or- about 3 cups of any cooked squash

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 medium-large onion, chopped (about 3 cups)

1½ teaspoons salt

1½ teaspoons curry powder

1 tablespoon freshly crushed garlic

1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger (page 235)

½ teaspoon Tabasco sauce

2 cups water

2 cans (12-ounce) tomato juice (3 cups)

1 cup half-and-half

-or- 1 can (14 oz) coconut milk (full fat)

1. While squash is cooking, heat oil in a 5-quart soup pot over medium high heat and add onions, curry, and salt. Sauté 10–15 minutes or until onion is soft. Add garlic and sauté another 2 minutes.
2. Stir in ginger, Tabasco, water, and cooked squash. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer 15 minutes.
3. Add tomato juice and half-and-half or coconut milk. **To purée soup:** If using an immersion blender, purée directly in pot. If using a food processor, let soup cool before puréeing in 2 batches. *(At this point you could store soup in the refrigerator for a few days.)* Bring back to a simmer and serve with a sprinkle of fresh chopped cilantro.

Speaking events and classes

7/15/2020 and 7/22/2020 – *Good Food, Great Medicine* TYPE 2 DIABETES REVERSAL and SUSTAINABLE WEIGHT LOSS 2-PART LIFESTYLE CHANGE CLASS SERIES: Portland, OR. Call our office at 503.291.1777 to register.

10/1/2020 – 10/22/2020 Providence Heart Institute BASECAMP Cardiac Prevention + Wellness 4-part Series: *Good Food, Great Medicine:* Portland, OR. Call the Providence Resource Line at 503.574.6595 to register or find *Good Food, Great Medicine* in the class catalog at providence.org/classes

Sign up for this free monthly medical + lifestyle newsletter at Goodfoodgreatmedicine.com

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

1 Thessalonians 5:21 (KJV)

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