

Healthy Habits to Reverse Cardiovascular Risk



To the Editor:

As a retired internist who has been managing her own type 2 diabetes for well over 2 decades now, I found the commentary “Stop stenting; start reversing atherosclerosis” by Schade et al, in the March 2021 issue of the *Green Journal*, of much personal and professional interest.¹ The authors recommend that primary care physicians discuss the role of medical treatments with patients who have stable angina. They also recommend that LDL cholesterol be brought below 50 mg/dL through a low cholesterol diet, along with the medications rosuvastatin (10 mg/d) and ezetimibe (10 mg/d). This letter is to raise awareness among patients and clinicians about the crucial role of timing of meals and exercise in cardiovascular health.

Healthy lifestyle habits have been shown to be better than medication in preventing diabetes.² Unfortunately, very few adults practice healthy habits for diabetes risk reduction.³ What is in a healthy meal is well known: fiber, lean protein, non-starchy vegetables, healthy fat, and, of course, carbohydrates in moderation.⁴ The American Diabetes Association recommends the Mediterranean diet, DASH (dietary approaches to stop hypertension) diet, low-carb diet, and the plate method. People, however, are not aware that there is a time for everything including eating and exercising.

As for timing, eating most of the carbohydrates in the early part of the day offers improvements in^{5,6} weight, glycated hemoglobin level, fasting glucose level, cravings, insulin dose, C-peptide level, glucagon level, liver fat, and upregulation of clock genes. This is because metabolism is optimal when we eat this way; glucose tolerance is poor in the evening for most people.

Make use of the second meal effect by eating a morning snack that would offer lower glucose levels after breakfast. This is because glucose tolerance is also worse in the morning for people with insulin resistance.⁷ Very few people know about this century-old second-meal phenomenon.⁸

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A 30- to 60-minute morning walk every other day offers many benefits: no hypoglycemia during the activity, glucose tolerance improves for 24 hours and beyond, and fasting glucose normalizes.^{9,10}

A 20- to 25-minute brisk walk or yard work 30 minutes after the start of lunch will blunt the glucose surge in real time.⁹ Post-meal walks can be alternated with pre-meal walks.

According to the evidence, those who practice these simple habits will likely enter a virtuous cycle and enjoy many metabolic benefits, including control of glucose, lipids, blood pressure, and weight.

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