

Pastor's Corner – 7-20-2019 – Things I Have No Business Commenting On: More on Diabetes

Remember, I am neither a medical doctor nor a nutritionist. I also don't receive dietary advice directly from God in dreams or visions. Therefore, please consult your doctor before making any dramatic changes in your diet. (#standarddisclaimer, #pleasedon'tsue).

There's more than one way to skin a cat. At least that's what they say. I haven't personally tried but that seems to be the expert opinion. Speaking of expert opinion (nice transition right??) the nutrition science realm is full of expert opinions and quite often those experts are on complete opposite ends of the spectrum. This is as true in the realm of diabetes management as in any other realm of nutrition and health.

A few weeks ago I suggested that a possible way to control diabetes was through eating a low carb diet. The bio-chemistry reason for this approach is that when you digest carbohydrates your blood sugar rises triggering the release of insulin. Too much insulin over too long a time period seems to be what leads to insulin resistance (kind of like drug tolerance for an addict). Once your cells become resistant to insulin you need more insulin to clear out the blood sugar, thus creating more resistance and eventually diabetes. Right, so that's pretty much how the mechanism works and I think (but could be wrong) that the experts mostly agree with the process here (even if I have over-simplified it). It seems logical then, if you want to reverse insulin resistance (and therefore diabetes) that it's a good idea to avoid the stimulus that brought it about in the first place, i.e. high carbohydrate consumption.

Now, I'm sure that a very low carb diet isn't the only way to reverse diabetes. I've come across a few articles and videos that recommend the exact opposite, actually. The experts on this side of the equation recommend a low fat diet that is high in whole grains, fruit, and veggies. Avoid processed food and sugar and you should be good to go. I'm sure that some physicians have had good success with this approach. Here's my problem though, that's the standard dietary advice that almost everyone hears and it just isn't working. Diabetes is up, obesity is up, heart disease remains the number one cause of death in our country. So, either the entire country is non-compliant with this approach, or perhaps this approach is only effective with a small subset of the population. I believe the latter is more likely and I think that's why more and more research is being directed toward the efficacy of low carb, high fat diets for the treatment of chronic disease.

Speaking of research, I wanted to share some data from trials that used LCHF to treat and reverse diabetes so that you know I'm not here just making stuff up. If the standard advice hasn't worked for you, I hope this data will encourage you to, a) talk to your doctor, and b) try a different approach. I also want to reinforce that these trials are focused on type 2 diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is a whole 'nother ballgame.

The first trial is run by Virta health. Their intervention focuses on a LCHF diet that puts patients into ketosis. They supplement the diet with regular coaching and equipment to monitor blood ketones to evaluate compliance with the diet (in another post I can talk about ketones – for now just know that they are made by your body when you are eating very few carbs). The trial initially had 262 adult volunteers following the intervention protocol and 87 who followed the standard care approach (basically the recommendations I mentioned earlier). At the start of the study, 92% of the patients in the intervention group were obese, and 88% were taking medications for glycemic control including insulin. At the end of one year (reported in 2018) 94% of the intervention participants who were using insulin reduced their dose or stopped using it altogether, there was no change in the "control" group. Participants in the intervention group also experienced weightloss, a decrease in LDL, and increase in HDL and improvement in biomarkers related to diabetes and metabolic syndrome. For those who know the lingo, there were zero cases of ketoacidosis in the intervention group.

83% of the intervention group stuck with it for the full year, which is pretty good considering it required some pretty drastic changes to diet. But a drastic disease may just require a drastic remedy. At any rate, they continued the study for another year, and while a few more dropped out along the way, those who continued with the program continued to see positive results. At 2 years 55% of those who stayed on the treatment saw a reversal of their diabetes (by reversal they mean taking no insulin and no diabetes meds with the exception of metformin). Additionally, 18.8% saw actual remission (meaning no diabetes meds at all). The standard care group saw 10% of participants achieve reversal and 0% remission (meaning the low carb approach was 5 times more effective). Now this isn't a randomized controlled trial, but the results are real and they show a clear advantage favoring the low carb approach.

There's another recent study (published this year) out of Ohio State University where researchers wanted to see what would happen with obese patients who had metabolic syndrome (a precursor to diabetes) if they were on a low carb diet but didn't lose any weight (the calorie content of the diets were designed to keep participants at their current body weight). It was a small study (only 16 men and women) and of short duration (only 4 weeks). But what they found was that at the end of the study over half the participants no longer met the criteria for metabolic syndrome. This is an important one because it demonstrates that metabolic disease can be positively effected by a low carb diet independent of any weight loss. This, in my opinion, seems to support the bio-chemical reasons for low carb that I mentioned earlier and in previous posts. In other words, low carb (even if it's high calorie) doesn't have the same insulin response as a high carb diet (even if it's low calorie) which means it helps break the insulin resistance cycle. Low carb = low insulin = a decrease in metabolic disorders.

They're more trials out there. You can Google "low carb diabetes reversal" and read to your heart's content. You can probably also Google "whole food diabetes reversal" or "high carb diabetes reversal" and find similar content. As I said, there's experts on both sides. But the standard approach to diabetes care is to encourage patients to focus on low fat, whole foods and to cut calories. Most of us have tried that with unfavorable results. What do we call it when we keep trying the same thing over and over again but expect different results?

At any rate, if you've tried the standard approach and it hasn't worked, why not talk to your doctor about trying a low carb, high fat, ketogenic diet? You might just be able to decrease meds and turn USS diabetes around.

Happy Sabbath
Pastor Tyler