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AYURVEDA

Dreaded Diabetes

The time-tested remedies of Ayurveda can dramatically improve the diabetic's life

Dr. Virender Sodhi

Ayurveda is an ancient science that has been practiced for over fifty centuries. Modern science is done through a hit-and-trial basis: making a hypothesis and then proving it through various experiments. Ayurvedic science is, instead, perceived through a universal intelligence, present in every aspect of life, and realizing that very intelligence through our surroundings. Ayurvedic sages realized that, as humans, we are bound to make mistakes and create a mess in our internal and external environment, thus creating a disease process. This dis-ease is simply seen as a mistake of the intellect (pragyaapradha). The purpose of human life has been perceived to fulfill four innate desires: religious (dharma), wealth (artha), pleasure (kama), and finally to achieve liberation from rebirth (moksha). Religion is not seen as just going to temple, church or a mosque, but also as our responsibility towards our environment and planet. A sick person cannot achieve all these goals, which is why ayurvedic medicine created a science for forming a perfect balance through nutrition (ahar), environment (vihar), yoga, meditation and the use of herbal medicines and minerals. These same herbs are used as spices in Indian cooking, because their disease-protective action is so powerful. Common spices such as turmeric, ginger, garlic, cumin, fennel, cardamom, black pepper and many more have shown powerful actions against bacteria, virus and fungus, as well as protection against cancers, arthritis, heart disease, hypertension and diabetes.

The more I study science, the more it makes perfect sense to me to use the ayurvedic model of disease prevention. In this column I will be discussing spices, herbs, minerals and other natural substances used in ayurvedic and other folk medicine. I will discuss their folklore uses, scientific studies, safety and toxic effect

and their interaction with drugs in the treatment of common diseases, starting with diabetes.

Diabetes is the sixth-leading cause of death and the number-one cause of kidney failure, blindness and amputations in the US. It increases the chance of heart attacks by two to four times, and 60-70 percent of patients with diabetes get nerve damage. There are many factors that contribute to it, such as stress, an inactive lifestyle, poor nutrition and genetic predisposition. This condition is on the rise, especially in the East Indian population. Recently, I presented a lecture to a group of physicians, who were all of Indian origin. It was interesting to see that 40 percent of these physicians who were over 50 years old were overweight and suffering from Type II Diabetes.

For a diabetic patient, tight blood sugar control is highly important over time. Usually, as the patient ages, the oral hypoglycemic drugs and insulin become less effective in keeping blood sugars in normal ranges, thus creating many complications. There are two reasons for these complications. One is the fact that the nutrition regime prescribed by the American Diabetes Association is not the best for diabetic control. The other is lack of exercise. There is a popular ayurvedic saying that says if you walk ten miles per day, the diabetes will run away. There is much truth in this saying. Studies have shown that individuals who walked fast for 45 minutes per day have much more blood-sugar controls than those who did not walk.

There are specific herbs known to help the diabetic. The first of these is gurmar (*Gymnema sylvestre*) which regenerates the pancreas. The name itself implies its actions. Gur means "sugar" and mar means "to kill." Ayurvedic tradition has known for centuries that *Gymnema sylvestre* can help diabetic patients, but recent scientific research is proving its benefits. *Gymnema* extract has shown positive clinical results in both Type I and Type II diabetes. In patients with Type I diabetes, it reduced the insulin requirements. Some of the Type II diabetes patients were completely able to go off oral hypoglycemic drugs, while others were able to reduce their drug usage considerably. No side effects have been noticed in these therapeutic doses. For my patients, I recommend 400 mg standardized extract of *gymnema* three times per day before meals.

The herb karela (bitter melon) acts like insulin. Both karela and neem have been shown to improve blood sugar in diabetic patients. In some studies, karela extract

has shown more hypoglycemic effects than the drug tolbutamide. Karela also contains an insulin-like polypeptide and has fewer side effects than insulin. Oral administration of karela juice has shown to improve blood sugar levels and lower glycosylated hemoglobin. Glycosylated hemoglobin, commonly known as A1c, can tell us how the sugar controls have been in the past three months and is a better indicator of long-term sugar controls. I recommend 57 grams of karela juice with every meal, or 1,000 mg of standardized extract of karela three times per day with meals.

Common cinnamon, dalchini, can cut the complications of diabetes. It has been shown to decrease serum glucose, LDL cholesterol (the "bad cholesterol ") and triglycerides in various human studies. In animal studies, the cinnamon extract improved insulin action via increasing glucose uptake in muscles. In Type II diabetes there is no lack of insulin, however the insulin is ineffective in pushing the sugar into the muscles in our body. Another spice, fenugreek, also known as methi, has shown to decrease blood glucose, LDL cholesterol, VLDL cholesterol and triglycerides. I recommend taking one to six grams of cinnamon powder and 15 grams of fenugreek every day with food.

Diabetes is a serious disease, and should not be self medicated. It is always recommended to seek the advice of a qualified professional. In my clinic, patients have successfully dropped oral hypoglycemic agents or reduced their doses considerably. Similarly, in patients with Type I diabetes, insulin requirements have dropped between 25 and 50 percent.

Disclaimer: This article is purely informative and should not replace the guidance of your physician. If you suffer from an illness, you should consult a physician before taking any herbs, vitamins, minerals or enzymes. Even at the peak of health, it is best to consult a qualified practitioner before taking any dietary supplement.

Dr. Virender Sodhi holds an M.D. (Ayurved) from India and a N.D. from Bastyr College of Naturopathic Medicine, USA. E-mail: drsodhi@ayurvedicscience.com Web: <http://www.ayurvedicscience.com>