

# Management and Treatment of Type-2 Diabetes Using

## Diet, Herbs, and Acupuncture

By Bradley Capron, L.Ac.

Diabetes is becoming an increasingly prevalent disease in developed countries, but the good news is that it is one of the easiest conditions to reverse, or manage, with simple, healthy lifestyle, and dietary choices. I am talking specifically about adult-onset, type 2 diabetes. Type 1, insulin dependent diabetics can benefit from all the same advice here, but reversal is an impossibility as far as I know. The eastern medical model has a very different way of looking at disease, and I want to start there, as it gives excellent context to understand the disease process of diabetes.

The advantage of looking at things through the traditional eastern medical paradigm, is that it is rich in symbolic, and qualitative descriptions that give context to the disease process. The first term often associated with diabetes is 'dampness'. In eastern medicine, this refers to excessive body fluid build-up, or normal lubricating substances in the body 'gumming' up, and becoming pathological. In diabetics, this can be seen in myriad ways. Fluid retention is often a problem in diabetics, as well as excessive urination, and poor fluid metabolism. In the digestive system, 'dampness' translates as a lack of 'fire' if you will, leading to poor ability to transform and transport foods into nourishment. Many foods are considered 'damp', and will increase this pathology. A good example of a 'damp' food is ice cream. Cold, lots of butterfat from cream, and loads of sugar all increase pathologic dampness in the digestive system, and weaken the fire of the Earth element organs (stomach and spleen). This is just one example of a damp food, but many other foods contribute to dampness. Other prime examples are white flour, processed sugars, most dairy, and fried foods. The presence of dampness, will, over time, compound into other problems.

Chronic dampness tends to congeal and thicken over time. When body fluids and digestive ability stagnate, congestion is created. With congestion and lack of movement, there is increased friction, which leads to pathological 'heat' in the body. This 'heat', will over time, burn out body fluids and other 'yin' nourishing-type substances in the body. This is exemplified in diabetics with excessive thirst, and also craving for sweets, as sweet substances tend to cool internal heat. Unfortunately, this is a destructive cycle, as sweet also promotes damp, which then leads to more heat, and more cravings, etc. So, as we can see, the 2 main pathologies involved in diabetes from a tradition eastern medical perspective are 'damp' and 'heat'.

The way someone like myself will treat someone with both 'damp' and 'heat', is primarily through diet, and secondarily through herbal therapy, and possibly acupuncture, depending on severity of things like peripheral neuropathies and fluid retention. Foods that counteract 'damp' are foods that are aromatic, warming, diuretic/draining, or bitter. Aromatic cooking herbs are great, and assist in digestive peristalsis (movement of smooth muscle lining in intestines), and breaking up fats and other 'thick' food substances.



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Diuretic and draining foods, like green tea, or many types of edible mushrooms, help the body purge excessive fluids. Warming foods and spices like ginger help to increase digestive 'fire', which will reduce dampness, improve circulation, and the ability to absorb nutrients. Bitter foods like bitter melon, and leafy greens, are both draining, and stimulate bile production, which helps break up fats and oils. Foods that help diabetic-type deficient internal heat (different from excessive external heat, i.e. a flu with high temp), tend to be things like cooked whole grains, and raw foods. Raw leafy greens are particularly good for cooling internal deficient type heat.

A short list of herbs that I like for diabetics are most all medicinal mushrooms, gynostemma (excellent for blood sugar regulation), tulsi (holy basil, adaptogenic and improves kidney and digestive function), ginger (digestive and circulatory aid, fresh far superior to dried), turmeric (anti-inflammatory and digestive components), most all cooking herbs, nettle (cooling, detoxicant and very nourishing), bitters like gentian (draining and digestive), and omega oils (fish and vegetal, to replace depleted 'yin' fluids). An excellent diabetic soup I recommend for very fast improvement in blood sugar levels is as follows: Replace one meal a day with lightly simmered zucchini, snap peas, parsley, and celery. No salt, no spice, no oils, just water and veggies. This is extremely alkalizing to the system, and rapidly reduces sugar cravings over the course of a few weeks.

Acupuncture can help increase circulation in the hands and feet, since as digestive fire (which helps generate overall energy, and assists in circulation) is weakened with progressive dampness, the body will tend to cut off circulation/nourishment to the peripheral (hands and feet) parts, to keep the internal organs nourished first. Acupuncture can also help regulate kidney and bladder function, dispel internal heat, improve immune function, and regulate related circadian rhythms as well.

As I mentioned at the outset, there is tremendous potential for improvement with type-2 diabetics. Simple changes to diet, and lifestyle, coupled with holistic therapies like herbs and acupuncture, can lead to radically improved function, and complete reversal in many cases. The other, and primarily important factor, is the will power of the patient to make sustained changes and healthy choices for themselves and their future.



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