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DECEMBER 2023

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Optimum Levels for Longevity and Well-Being: J Curves

7 Ways to Make Sweet Potatoes Part of Your Low Blood Sugar Diet

Mastering Stability: Effective Strategies to Improve Your Balance

Smart Strategies for Holiday Season: How to Avoid Overeating

Home Cures That Work

Remember the bell curve? What we've been taught as "normal" is far from the truth! Health trends following this model are just averages and a predicted outcome. However, it's crucial to recognize that individual health is highly diverse, and factors contributing to well-being may not always conform to a bell-curve pattern. The J-curve, as highlighted in Dr. Scott Saunders' article, illustrates individualized variations and optimal levels of health are essential to understanding that health is a dynamic and multifaceted concept.

The issue also challenges the prevailing belief in the effectiveness of unstable-surface training devices for improving balance. Our article recommends focusing on stable-surface training to align with the demands of everyday life and sports activities and provides alternative strategies, to strengthen stabilizing muscles.

As the holiday season arrives with tempting comfort foods, individuals concerned about their health should be cautious of potential repercussions from overindulging. To navigate the festive season without succumbing to overeating, we recommend certain five tips and enjoy the joy of the season.

It is a wonderful time of the year. The holiday dinner table may be decked with delicious foods, but to give yourself a gift, be sure to pace yourself this season, balance your body, health and your appetite with Home Cures That Work!

For your health,

Cheryl Ravey,
Editor, Home Cures That Work

AUTHORS

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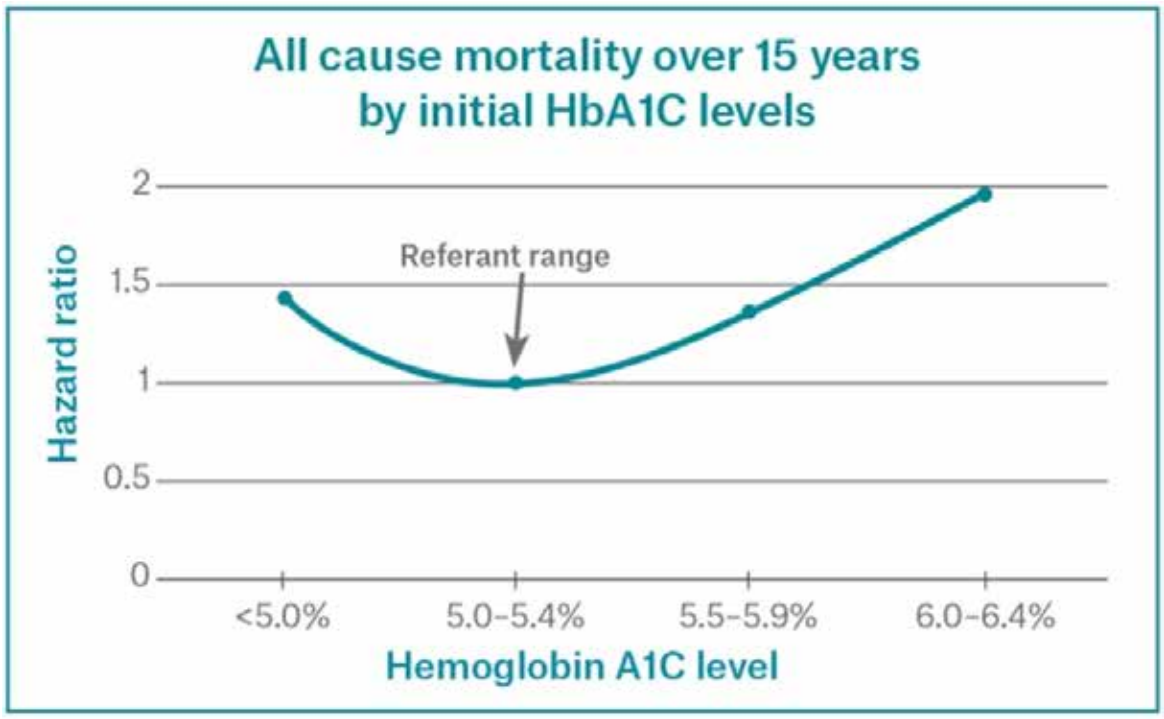
OPTIMUM LEVELS FOR LONGEVITY AND WELL-BEING: J CURVES

by Dr. Scott Saunders, M.D.

Today, I would like to share something called "optimal." We often think of things on a linear scale, but biology is rarely linear. There is a possibility of having too little, and too much. Therefore, there must be some optimal amount. It turns out that there is a 'J' curve for almost everything. The very bottom of the 'J' on a graph is the optimum level. I am going to use the 'J' curves for "ALL-CAUSE MORTALITY" because it is the least likely to be manipulated. If someone has some "heart disease" endpoint, there is a lot of play in the diagnosis, whereas when someone is dead… well, there's no faking that!

I am choosing what may seem like random graphs to illustrate certain points about what is optimal.

Hemoglobin A1C



This illustrates nicely what a 'J' curve looks like. The odds of dying increase on both sides of an optimum level. A study of over 11,000 people who did not have diabetes was assessed for their risks of dying from any cause.[1] It is very interesting to see that blood glucose (sugar) can be too low! Those with HbA1c at 5.0 or less have an increased risk of death. The best range of HbA1c is between 5.0 and 5.4. Those who have pre-diabetes (HbA1c 6.0-6.4) have twice the rate of death as those who have the optimum level – the bottom of the 'J' curve.

Thus, though doctors are told that lower is better, and that pre-diabetes does not need to be treated, clearly there is an optimal level that makes a difference in lives.

Vitamin D

Even vitamins can have a 'J' curve. We can get too much. Too much of anything can be toxic. However, Vitamin D is a good case to illustrate the effects of the "95% confidence interval" or 95% CI. What that means is instead of just looking at the average, we look at where 95% of the people fall. Thus, in this graph you see a line, the average, with a dotted line on either side, which is the 95% CI. Notice that there is an ideal level where the average meets the "1.0" line, or the average rate of death. Then, the average stays at "1.0" while the 95% CI starts getting really wide as the level of vitamin D goes up over 70. That means that people are dying of other causes, and just happen to have high vitamin D. They are just as likely to live longer as to live shorter with high vitamin D levels. The clear optimum blood level of vitamin D is 70 nanomoles per liter, which corresponds to 30 nanograms per milliliter. (Different labs use different measurements).[2]

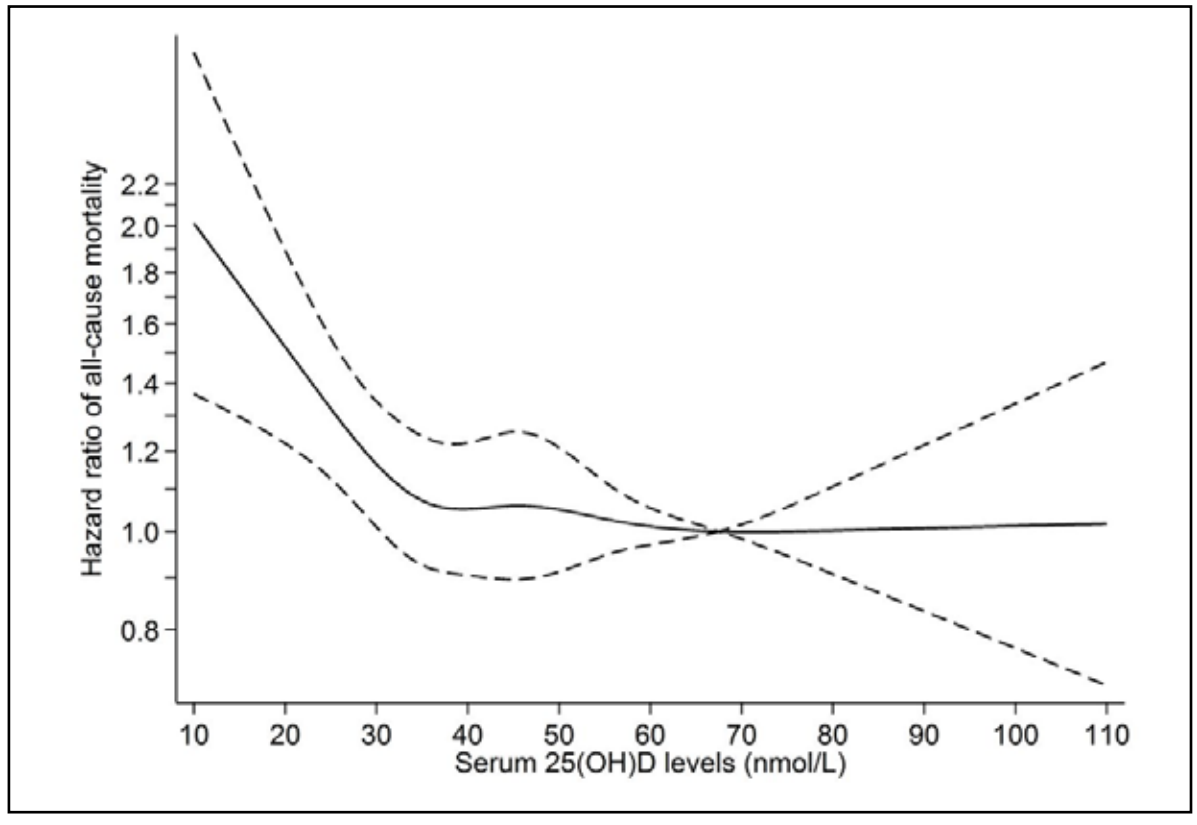
The take-home message is that Vitamin D does not get toxic at high levels, and is not associated with a risk of death, despite what doctors are told.

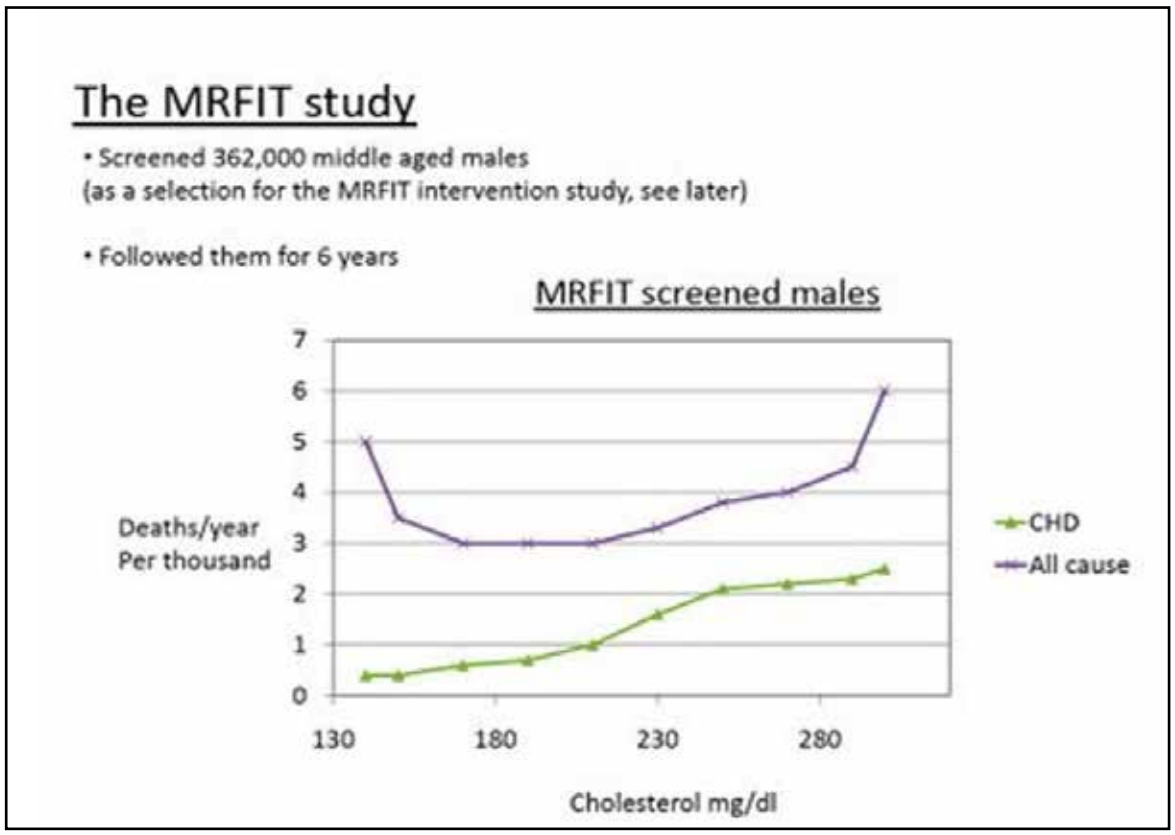
Cholesterol

There is an optimum amount of cholesterol.[3] Every study that looks at "All-Cause Mortality" shows that too little is worse than too much. So why do the doctors always tell us that it is best to be below 200? It is because those who do marketing for cholesterol medications narrowly focus only on "Cardiovascular" issues. Here is a graph from the famous MRFIT study[4] of over 350,000 men starting in 1980.

(Graph on next page.)

Notice how the "ALL CAUSE" mortality has a 'J' curve, with lower

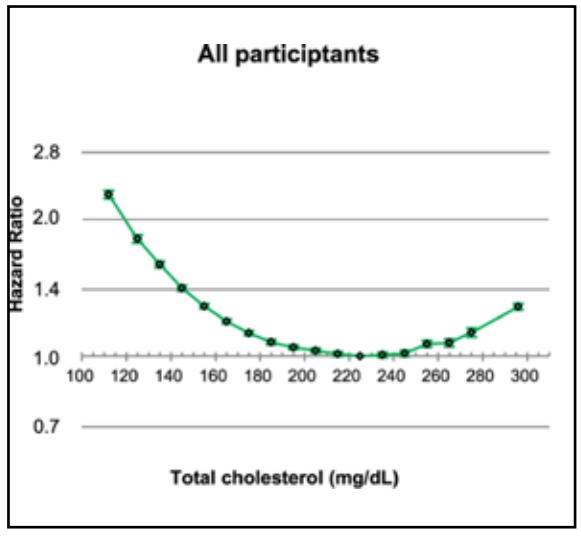




cholesterol being associated with higher death rates. However, the "CARDIOVASCULAR" mortality keeps going down. So, the drug companies taught the doctors not to look at "All-Cause Mortality," just focus on heart disease.

For "All-Cause Mortality," the cause of death is not distinguished; it may be from COVID, or an automobile accident. So, how is that related to cholesterol levels? We don't know. We do know that low cholesterol is related to cognitive decline, since cholesterol is needed for the function of all nerves, especially in the brain, as well as immune function. Every cell requires cholesterol to function. So, whatever the reason, even though people die less from cardiovascular disease, there is consistent and compelling evidence that those with a cholesterol level between 200 and 250 are less likely to die in a given time, than those who are below 200, the ideal chosen by cardiologists.

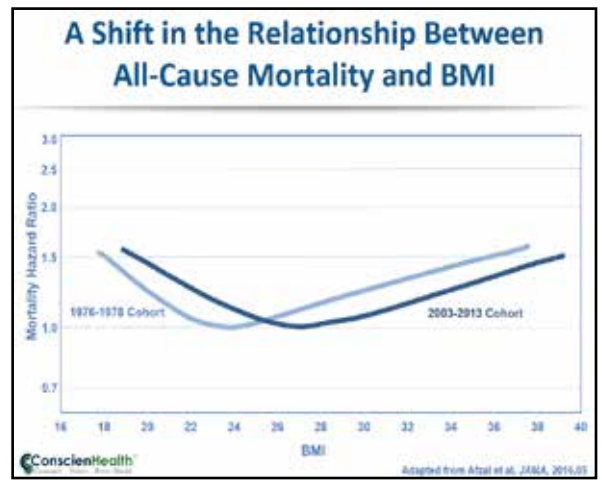
The largest study ever done includes 12.8 million adults (that's over 12 million more than the previous study, and included young adults and women) and showed that men or women in every age group have an optimal level of cholesterol around 230.



On the right, "Hazard Ratio," 1.0 means one time the average, or normal, death rate. 2.0 is twice the average death rate, and so on. Looking at this graph, you can see that the 95% CI is very small, that means the association is strong, or the level of cholesterol is likely related to the cause of death. It becomes obvious that the optimal level of cholesterol is around 230. A cholesterol level of 120 has twice the risk of death as someone with a cholesterol of 220!

Body Mass Index (BMI)

Body mass index uses a weight to height ratio. The optimal has always thought to be what is "normal." However, normal has changed.[5]



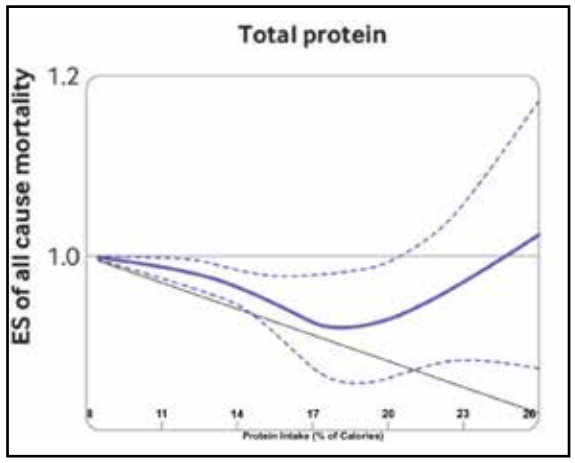
We are told that BMI should be between 20 and 24. However, the most current studies indicate a different story. It seems in modern society that 27 has the lowest mortality. That is considered overweight. In fact, according to the graph, a person who is obese with a BMI over 30 is at a lower risk of death than a person with a BMI of 20, which was previously considered optimal. The old saying, "You can't be too rich or too thin" is not true (in either case!).

Protein

We have been told that there is an association between protein intake and health. Because the graph of mortality to protein intake is complex, people have interpreted portions of it to indicate that more is better, or less is better.

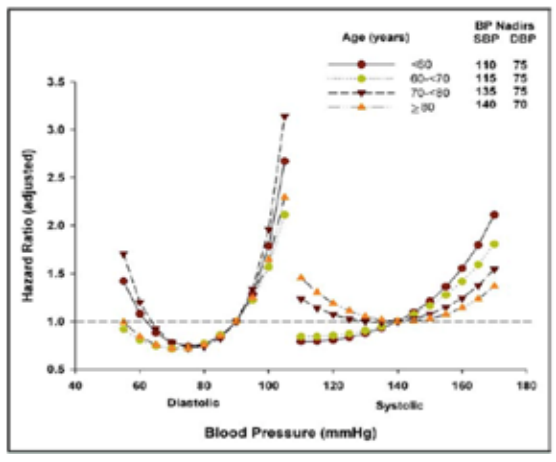
It seems clear that adequate protein intake lowers the risk of death, up to a point. But notice that the 95% CI gets wider and wider as protein is increased.

The optimum amount of protein intake seems to be about 18% of calories. More than 25% of Calories may increase risk of death.



Blood Pressure

There is a lot of information on blood pressure because so many studies have been done over many decades. I'm going to share one interesting study, the INVEST study, with over 22,000 people because they separated people by age groups.[6] The "J" curve in this is obvious in all age groups, but different age groups have different optimal blood pressures.

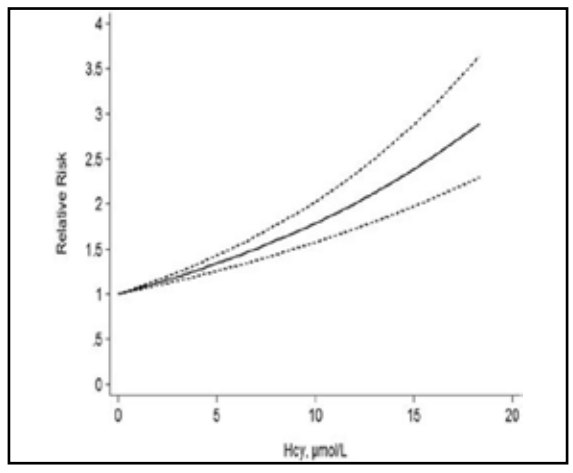


Diastolic blood pressure does not change – the optimum remains at 75 mmHg. The ideal diastolic blood pressure stays within a narrow range. Systolic blood pressure, however, increases over a few decades of life from an optimal of 110 mmHg for those less than 60 years old, to 140 for those over 80. Moreover, older people don't want their systolic blood pressure to be lower than 140 because their death rate goes up. For a person over 80 years old, a systolic blood pressure of 120 is a higher risk than a blood pressure of 150.

Another very interesting thing to note is that when the blood pressure is optimal, the risk of dying is less than one. In other words, an optimal blood pressure will prolong your life. Notice that nothing else we have seen actually increases life span (where the "Mortality Ratio" is less than "1.0").

Homocysteine

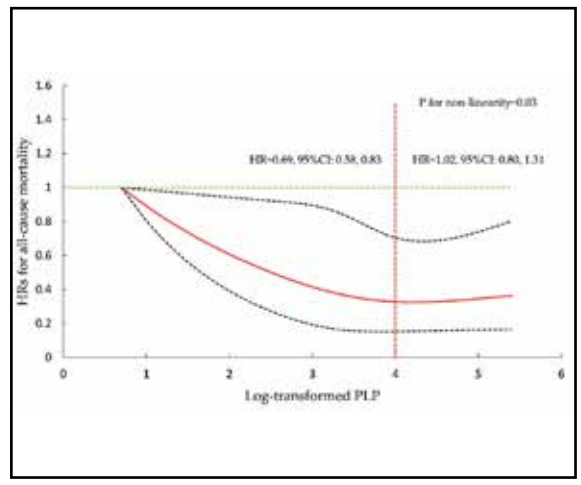
Not everything has a "J"curve. Some things are not needed by the body. For example, the waste product homocysteine is often measured as a marker for methylation, or the function of the B-vitamins: B12, B6, and B9 (folic acid). In this case, the lower the better.[7]



"Hcy" is homocysteine. "Relative Risk" is relative risk of death. "1" is the average risk of dying and "2" is twice the average risk of dying. Clearly, in the case of homocysteine, there is no "optimal" amount – less is better.

Vitamin B6 (Pyridoxine)

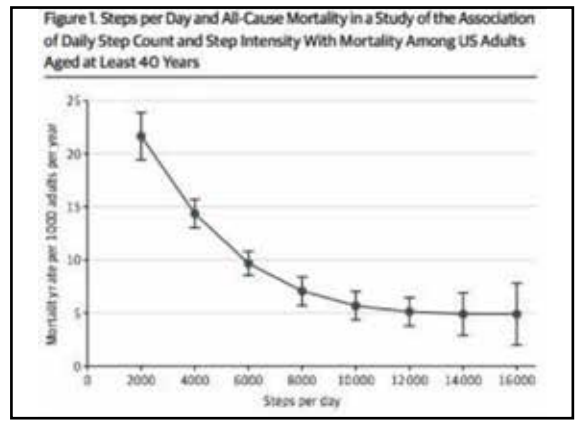
Another vitamin supplement that may actually lower death rate is vitamin B6. Pyridoxine is essential for so many functions in the body.[8]



"PLP" means "Pyridoxal-5-Phosphate." The optimal level is 4, making the death rate significantly lower than "1." Notice that a blood level higher than 4 shows a slight increase in death rate.

Exercise

Let's look at the effect of exercise on mortality.[9]



This is a different 'J' curve that only has the downside for those taking fewer steps. The benefit of exercise levels out after about 12,000 steps. Those who take half as many steps have about twice the risk of dying. I include this to illustrate that sometimes "All-cause Mortality" can be deceptive. Those who are sick are going to take fewer steps because of disability. Those who are healthy and strong are going to take more steps. So, this

is one of those “of course!” graphs. Nothing to see here! Except, consider that if you want to be healthy and vigorous and lower your death rate it is still a good Idea to remain active.

Recommendations for Optimal Health

The take-away message is that there is an optimal amount of everything. Don’t do too little, and don’t do too much! How do you know? Let’s look at some simple guidelines:

1. Eat moderate amounts of Calories from carbohydrates, fats, and protein. (and fast periodically)

2. Take vitamins every week. Think about it: a person can get a few milligrams of vitamin B3 from food on a daily basis, and the supplement is a hundred times that. Most nutrients are similar. Taking the supplements on a weekly basis allows your nutrients from food to be absorbed, and the huge amounts in the pills can “fill up the tank” on a weekly basis so you keep an optimal level.

3. Exercise regularly, doing more than average. Instead of 6,000 steps, take 10,000 to 12,000.

4. Keep your DIASTOLIC (the lower number) blood pressure around 75 by exercising and lowering stress. Stress is significantly related to elevated diastolic blood pressure.

5. Keep your blood sugar around 100, or HbA1c between 5.0 and 5.4.

6. Get homocysteine down as low as possible.

If you have questions about a specific blood test or supplement, look up the mortality rates associated with it. You may be surprised to find that it is different than the conventional wisdom dictates. Instead of looking for “normal” or “average” or “expected range,” look for what is optimal. I hope this gives you an understanding of how to interpret your findings to discover what is optimal.

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Sources: [1] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20200384/ [2] https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/7/6/e017256 [3] https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-38461-y [4] https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/182557 [5] https://conscienhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Shifiting-BMI-Mortality-Curves.png [6] https://blogs.bmj.com/heart/2010/11/09/hypertension-targets-in-the-elderly/ [7] https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-017-05205-3 [8] https://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/13/9/2977 [9] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35247352/[7] https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-017-05205-3

7 Ways to Make Sweet Potatoes Part of Your Low Blood Sugar Diet

SWEET POTATOES ARE HIGHLY REGARDED AMONG INDIVIDUALS WITH HIGH BLOOD SUGAR AND FOR GOOD REASON

SWEET POTATOES STAND out as a nutritional powerhouse, making them an excellent choice for individuals managing high blood sugar. Discover seven creative ways to seamlessly integrate this versatile and healthful root vegetable into your low-blood sugar-friendly diet.

Sweet potatoes stand out as a nutritional powerhouse, making them an excellent choice for individuals managing high blood sugar. Discover seven creative ways to seamlessly integrate this versatile and healthful root vegetable into your low-blood sugar-friendly diet.

As a root vegetable, sweet potatoes boast higher fiber content compared to their tuberous relative, the white potato. Fiber, indigestible by the human body, adds bulk without contributing extra calories and promotes prolonged feelings of fullness.

Sylvia White, RD, CDCES, a certified diabetes care and education specialist in Nashville, highlights the numerous health benefits of sweet potatoes. Notably, their anti-inflammatory properties and antioxidants play a role in preventing diseases, including heart disease—the leading cause of death in people with high blood sugar, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Greens, Sweet Potato, and Fried Egg Bowl Recipe:

Ingredients:

- 2 cups lettuce of choice
- Olive oil (1 tbsp, plus more for drizzling)
- 1 sweet potato, cubed
- 1 large egg
- ½ avocado
- ½ cup microgreens
- Salt, to taste
- Juice of ½ lemon.

Directions:

STEP 1: Preheat the oven to 375°F and line a baking pan with parchment paper. Lay the cubed sweet potato onto the pan, drizzle with olive oil, and sprinkle with salt. Roast for 35-45 minutes.

STEP 2: Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a pan over medium heat. Crack the egg into the pan and fry for 2-3 minutes until crispy.

STEP 3: Assemble the salad by adding lettuce, microgreens, roasted sweet potato, fried egg, and avocado to a bowl. Drizzle with oil, lemon juice, and salt.

Sweet potatoes are rich in antioxidants, including vitamin C, crucial for blood vessel formation and repair, muscle development, and collagen production, according to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Additionally, sweet potatoes are an excellent source of vitamin A, potentially enhancing the function of pancreatic beta cells responsible for insulin production.

When preparing sweet potatoes, opt for boiled varieties when possible. Boiled sweet potatoes have a lower glycemic index, offering a gradual release of energy without causing rapid blood sugar spikes. In contrast, baked, mashed, and roasted sweet potatoes tend to have higher glycemic index values.

7 Tips and Tricks for Preparing Sweet Potatoes for Low Blood Sugar:

If you have high blood sugar, incorporating sweet potatoes into your daily meals is feasible with some mindful considerations.

1. MINDFUL PORTIONS

Limit portions to half a sweet potato per meal or snack.

Pair sweet potatoes with a protein source, such as chicken breast or eggs, to stabilize blood glucose levels.

2. SMOOTHIE BOOST

Add cooked sweet potato pieces to a smoothie with banana, yogurt, and a sprinkle of aromatic spices.

3. NUT BUTTER DELIGHT

Top a heated half-baked sweet potato with nut butter and fresh grapes.

4. SWEET POTATO TOAST

Cut sweet potatoes into thin slices, toast, and top with high-protein options like cottage cheese, Greek yogurt, or eggs.

5. FLAVORFUL BAKED SIDE

Add chipotle pepper for a sweet and spicy baked sweet potato side.

Roll baked sweet potato pieces in a mixture of nuts, seeds, and cinnamon.

6. MASHED GOODNESS

Mash-cooked sweet potatoes with diabetes-friendly seasonings like cinnamon and ginger.

Enjoy mashed sweet potatoes as a side or breakfast dish with yogurt, nuts, or nut butter.

7. SWEET POTATO BOWL

Cube-cooked sweet potato and add it to a bowl with black beans, cooked quinoa, and sautéed spinach.

8. HEARTY SOUP ADDITION

Enhance soups with the creamy texture and sweetness of sweet potatoes.

Try a flavorful sweet potato soup made with red lentils, carrots, onions, and various spices and herbs.

By embracing these tips and tricks, you can savor the deliciousness and nutritional benefits of sweet potatoes while effectively managing high blood sugar..

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MASTERING STABILITY: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE YOUR BALANCE

IF YOU'RE SEEKING to enhance your balance, you don't necessarily need to hop on a wobbleboard. In fact, keeping at least one foot on solid ground might be the key to achieving better stability. Regardless of your fitness preferences—whether you're into running, hiking, biking, swimming, weight lifting, sports, or simply chasing after your kids—maintaining good balance is essential to prevent injuries and build strength.

Contrary to popular belief, recent research challenges the effectiveness of unstable-surface training (UST) devices, such as wobble boards and BOSU balance trainers, in improving balance for healthy, trained individuals. While UST is beneficial for rehabilitating injuries, its impact on the performance of a healthy athlete remains questionable.

According to Eric Cressey, a renowned fitness professional and founder of Cressey Performance in Boston, UST may even de-power healthy athletes and

hinder power and performance improvements. Instead, he suggests focusing on stable-surface training to align your workouts with the demands of everyday life and sports activities.

Stability vs. Instability

Cressey conducted a study comparing athletes trained on stable and unstable surfaces. The research revealed that replacing as little as 2 to 3 percent of overall training with UST in healthy, trained athletes impaired sprinting speed and vertical jump height. This decline in power output may be attributed to the quick and prolonged pronation caused by UST, putting individuals in a constant "deceleration mode."

To improve your balance on solid ground, consider the following strategies:

1. TRAIN ON ONE LEG

Incorporate unilateral (single-leg) training into your routine to challenge stability while keeping one foot firmly planted. This helps strengthen stabilizing muscles around the spine, promotes equal strength in both legs and reinforces knee-stabilizing muscles.

2. ALTER GRAVITY

Move your center of gravity upward or forward to challenge stability. This can be achieved by performing exercises with one or both arms raised, forcing core and spinal muscles to work harder to compensate.

3. CLOSE YOUR EYES

Improve proprioception by closing your eyes during certain exercises. This enhances agility and reaction times, as your neuromuscular system is solely responsible for reacting without visual input.

Exercises to Enhance Balance

Incorporate the following three exercises into your fitness routine to see improvements in your balance:

1. SINGLE-LEG STANCE

Stand on one leg, gradually lifting the other.

Hold onto a chair for stability and progress to hands-free positions as your balance improves.

Yoga poses like the tree pose can also be effective.

2. STEP-UPS

Use a 5-pound dumbbell in each hand.

Step up onto an 18- to 24-inch-tall box, emphasizing the heel of the up foot.

Ensure each leg is equally developed by performing 10 reps per leg.

3. ONE-HAND OVERHEAD SQUAT

Hold a weight in one hand, extending the arm overhead.

Descend into a squat, maintaining a natural arch in your back.

Perform 10 reps on each side to challenge stability and improve balance.

When Is Unstable-Surface Training a Good Idea?

UST can be beneficial when addressing chronic functional ankle instability resulting from sprains. It helps retrain muscles to react quickly and prevent future injuries, especially in the lower body. For upper-body training, UST is effective as long as the feet remain firmly planted on solid ground. Exercises like pushups on a BOSU or dumbbell presses using a stability ball as a "bench" engage the upper body and torso effectively.

In conclusion, mastering stability doesn't necessarily require fancy equipment or unstable surfaces. By incorporating targeted exercises on solid ground, you can enhance your balance, prevent injuries, and improve overall performance.

Smart Strategies for Holiday Season: How to Avoid Overeating

THIS'S THE SEASON when our fridges and dinner tables are adorned with comfort foods, tempting us to indulge. However, for those mindful of heart health, holiday binge eating can have serious repercussions. Learn effective strategies to rein in those impulses and prioritize your well-being.

As festive feasts grace our tables, it's crucial to be mindful of pacing ourselves during this season to gift our hearts a healthy holiday. Overindulgence not only leads to short-term discomfort like heartburn but also poses long-term risks such as unhealthy weight gain and obesity, major contributors to heart disease and heart attacks according to the American Heart Association. A study in Clinical Research in Cardiology even pinpointed a peak in cardiac-related hospital admissions during the holiday season, with overeating identified as a significant trigger.

Dr. Amnon Beniaminovitz, a cardiologist with Manhattan Cardiology, likens binge eating to stress on the body, similar to emotional outbursts or strenuous physical activities. Sonia Tolani, MD, from Columbia University Medical Center, emphasizes that the consequences of overeating extend beyond the holiday season, potentially leading to conditions like type 2 diabetes—a substantial risk factor for heart disease, especially in women.

Beyond heart-related risks, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) underscores that being overweight increases susceptibility to various conditions such as stroke, osteoarthritis, depression, and anxiety.

Here are five cardiologist-approved tips

to navigate the holiday season without succumbing to overeating:

Stick to a Routine

Maintain a strict diet and exercise regimen, sticking to regular meal times to avoid holiday gluttony. If holiday meals disrupt your routine, eat a healthy breakfast, bring a nutritious snack, and consider a post-meal walk.

Avoid Foods With Saturated Fat

Steer clear of high-fat and dairy-rich foods. Opt for heart-healthy alternatives like lean proteins, fresh fruits, vegetables, and high-fiber whole grains. Limit indulgences to a quarter of your plate.

Take Your Time

Slow down and chew your food well. It takes about 20 minutes for your brain to register fullness. Put your fork down between bites, and consider drinking water to pace yourself.

Plan Ahead

Have a strategy before attending holiday gatherings, such as eating a healthy snack before arriving, staying hydrated, or planning to enjoy small portions of your favorite treats. Stick to your plan.

Focus on the Company

Shift your focus from food to the company of friends and family. Engage in conversations between bites, helping you eat less and savor the joy of the season with loved ones.

By adopting these strategies, you can savor the festive season without compromising your heart health and overall well-being.

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