

# The Many Faces of Diabetes Mellitus

In Chinese medicine we don't have a diagnosis of Diabetes, but in its many forms, diabetes has always been known to us. So, it is confusing when someone asks us to treat their diabetes, we have to give them a good going over to decide what stage of diabetes they are in.

Classically, in type II diabetes we are looking at a blood test that may reveal that our circulating blood sugars are high. This may be initiated by the patient coming to the doctor and talking about any variety of symptoms including: tiredness, extreme thirst, night sweating or getting hot, kidney dysfunction (most often frequent urination), general loss of eyesight cataracts or optic neuritis, numbness or neuropathy of the limbs, circulatory problems or pain as in phlebitis, heart problems or palpitations, and though these are the main ones the list can continue with subsidiary implications.

The fact remains that regardless of its dire implications and ensuing symptoms, this late onset of diabetes has a predictable history and course through its eventual result. While we would like to blame it on age or being the member of a certain group, the picture of the disease could start when we are much younger and only end up in a place where we are getting legs amputated losing our eyesight, ending up on dialysis or even death.

## The Science of Diabetes

The endocrine part of the pancreas, the Isle of Langerhans, secretes three major hormones. One is Insulin to help the body absorb and store circulating levels of blood glucose. The second is Glucagon which does just the opposite and brings up circulating levels of glucose in blood plasma between meals when the body is in fasting mode. The body in its constant attempt at balance and homeostasis tries to keep glucose levels in the blood stream at a balance because if it is too high its imbalance can create damage to the cellular and organ levels of certain areas of our body where fine vascular impairment can be critical (the eyes, the kidneys, brain and legs). The third one, called somatostatin, is still not largely understood and might just confuse our understanding at this juncture.

In type I diabetes the body turns off to its own ability to secrete insulin. In type II diabetes, there are largely two reasons why you might find high levels of circulating glucose. The first is what we call insulin resistant diabetes. For some reason in some people, when fat stores get to a certain level, the body decides that it doesn't want to store any more glucose or fats or anything else and it just leaves it in the blood stream. The kidneys decide that it wants to work more frequently so it can spill out this excess glucose (polyuria), which creates a sort of diuretic process and the person gets infinitely more thirsty (polydipsia). Let's say you haven't gone to see the doctor even now and you begin to notice that you are infinitely more tired. Because the insulin is no longer being secreted, the glucagon may be secreted in its stead which causes the body to start catabolizing or breaking down stores of fat even as your kidneys are overworking to spill out the excess glucose. All of this requires energy, which is only part of the picture. The other part is that due to all the catabolic activity another facet happens and that is that ketones, which are normally a source of energy in the body, like glucose, become overabundant and causes ketoacidosis which greatly lowers the blood PH and let's just say screws up the works big time as well as could eventually kill you. In fact, by this time much of the rest of your endocrine system, the thyroid, the adrenals etc. are all malfunctioning and so you are just way out of wack.

When someone is extremely obese and generally out of shape because of too much of the wrong food and too little exercise it is easy to understand how they got there, but type II diabetes also happens to the not so fat but very stressed. When we are very stressed and the body goes easily into some form of fight or flight mode that may not be the outright flight from charging rhino, but instead the fear of growing broke or divorce or any of the hundreds of things that the body can dredge up or imagine, the body wants to keep up its stores of circulating plasma glucose to facilitate the needs of the muscles. The disparity and the pain in the muscles happens (hmmm, lactic acid buildup and fibromyalgia maybe?) and while we don't actually run from anything an evolutionary reaction to our simpler former selves forms the same response. I have had many such individuals in my office over time and when I am successful at getting the patient to recognize that it is their response to stress that has to be treated, we have had a fair amount of success at controlling their resultant high blood sugar levels.

## **The Path of Destruction**

Perhaps the greater point of writing this article is that there are many subtler signs on the road to full type II diabetic dysfunction and high blood glucose could be seen in any one of them. In the early stage of someone who is somewhat of a sugar abuser is a general break down of the digestive process. We call this Spleen Qi (pronounced “*chi*”) deficiency. It is signaled by poor digestion and generally loose stool. The problems may very well start here as the body’s efficiencies at converting food to blood and muscle starts here. It is usually coupled with a condition called dampness (see article: [The Swamp Within Us](#)). When you are damp you are more likely to avoid drinking water and just generally feel heavy and laden, especially on damp days. Again your bowels are looser, perhaps more frequent, and you are just generally more tired. On cold days, you will be more cold. The extra weight you begin to put on is generally water weight and because you are probably already allergic to absorbing sugars you chase sweets to keep your energy up.

The next step is something called Kidney Yang deficiency. In this case you are likely to be cold all day long. As you wake up in the morning you will be stiff and low back aches are more the rule than the exception. You realize that the body’s ability to warm itself is way behind you and your joints will ache and feel loose, especially in cold damp weather, so you want to live like a lizard, laying on a rock someplace in the middle of the desert.

If these inefficiencies are allowed to continue the body will advance to another type of deficiency called a Yin deficiency. The blood does not only warm the body, it cools the body as well. Attribute this yin deficiency to a tendency to get hot at night and generally more thirsty. This would probably equate to this catabolizing process where the body starts to break down its own tissues to supply sugar to the system. Of course a yin deficiency does not always equate to type II diabetes, but when it does the body is entering a very serious and desperate stage where organ and vascular breakdown can occur.

### **Some Solutions**

Of course, the real answer is to restore the body’s digestive efficiencies. When we find someone spiraling into the depths of a deficiency disease like type II diabetes, it has wandered far from its scope of most normal functions. It is not just the pancreas that is bad, but the body has turned itself off to lots of substances that are integral to the digestive processes. For one, sugar is likely to be on the list, as it has become your biggest enemy. Along with this would be essential coenzymes like, Vitamins C, B, A, Iron and possibly Calcium and even amino acids the building blocks of proteins themselves.

We often find that the digestive organs are under functioning so we would probably use Nesshi (see pamphlet) therapy to redeem the functions of the stomach, pancreas, liver and kidneys. This step is also essential to redeem dynamic blood circulation, ensuring against further organ breakdown and flow to the tips of the limbs and the related nervous system.

With this much dysfunction comes a certain level of depression. Sometimes the lack of will to contribute to your own well being begins on the emotional level, and so emotional acupuncture may be warranted (see: Emotional Allergies). With this same commitment to bettering ourselves comes the onus of responsibility to adequate exercise. I find that this is where the system most often breaks down. I have had several patients that have been asserting for over a year to start a walking program, but have not been able to get around to it.

Lastly, Chinese herbs have been used for centuries to control blood sugars and improve digestive function. Many of my patients swear by it and use nothing else. When a patient uses western therapeutic drugs to control our blood sugars, they are not in fact improving their health to elicit this response, but tricking one of the body’s functions to control the level of sugar in the blood so that it does less damage. In my mind this does not amount to the same end. Whatever is the source of this wrong turn in your health will still be there as you create an increasing dependence on the function of the drug.

When someone is looking for the same path where all they do for their health is show up at the doctor’s office, then this is not the place they should be in the first place. However, when someone chooses to seek for redemption of their normal blood sugars through the road to better health and a balanced lifestyle, we will help them find those same solutions.