

Super-Parents...How Do You Do it? Making the Most of Your Energy

Part 1: Blood Sugar and Food Cravings

Blood sugar is a funny thing. If we're fasting intentionally, it's usually not an issue. But if we're fasting because we got too busy, it's an issue. Low blood sugar forces the body to use other fuel sources. This doesn't sound so bad, and actually sounds like a great way to shed some weight. But there's a catch. It also forces the body to produce cortisol. At normal levels, cortisol is a performance hormone. At high levels, it's a stress hormone. In most people, high-level cortisol decreases metabolism and encourages weight gain. This is why we tend to get more front weight if we're going through a really demanding or stressful time. If stress is long term, thyroid function may decrease.

Survival Mode

When the body has to produce high levels of cortisol, it puts us into Survival Mode. It's a body mechanics thing. In Thrive Mode, we produce happy hormones. In Survival Mode, we produce stress hormones.

I think that the body does this because it doesn't really know what's going on. It just knows that we feel stressed. We might just be running around and not getting enough time to ourselves. But for all the body knows, we could be heading into some kind of crisis that involves a food shortage.

It's the body's job to do whatever it takes to keep us alive and strong for as long as possible. This is Survival Mode.

How Do We Stay In Thrive Mode During Busy Season?

We don't always get to rest every time we need to, that's part of the commitment we've made to family or career. However, we want to at least stay in thrive mode, where the body is producing lots of happy hormones. If we can manage to stay in thrive mode, we're less likely to burn out.

Eat regularly. If your normal is to eat 3 or more times a day, try not to go more than an hour past when you'd normally eat. If you do intermittent fasting, do it regularly. Make sure the body knows what's coming. If you don't eat when the body expects you to, it will go into survival mode.

Be Careful with Heavy Starches and High Sugar Foods. They Tend to Encourage Food Cravings and Overeating.

These are what I call heavy starches: Pasta, breads, rice, potatoes, muffins and other baked goods. Gluten free or not, when it comes to blood sugar, starch is starch.

These are what I call high sugar foods: Energy drinks, soft drinks, 100% fruit juice, specialty coffees and teas that contain flavour syrup, coffee with more than 1 sugar, dried fruit. There are some unexpected foods that fall into this category. Low fat salad dressings such as French, poppyseed, and raspberry vinaigrette. BBQ sauces and stir fry sauces that contain glucose-fructose. I call these sauces “liquid candy” because they contain a deceptively high amount of sugar.

Yogurt needs to be mentioned here. Based on my clinical experience, mainstream yogurts seem to have a similar effect on the body as starches and sugars. There’s no doubt that yogurt contains protein, and I can’t explain why it seems to behave differently in the body from other high protein dairy products.

As for beer and wine, I’m sorry to say that it’s smart to consider these to have about the same amount of sugar per volume as grape juice or orange juice.

Avoid Rebound Hypoglycemia

Hypoglycemia means low blood sugar. Rebound hypoglycemia can occur after eating food that’s too high in heavy starch or sugar. The body has a blood sugar spike (high blood sugar), then quickly has a low blood sugar episode (hypoglycemia).

High blood sugar isn’t good for the organs and tissues, so the body will do its best to get blood sugar down as quickly as possible. This causes a low blood sugar episode. Cortisol is produced every time there’s a high blood sugar episode, and every time there’s a low blood sugar episode.

To make matters worse, every time we have a low blood sugar episode, we experience very strong cravings for foods that are high in starch and sugar. In this state, the body it demands quick carbs. These cravings are almost impossible to resist.

Is your body on a daily cycle of perpetual food cravings?

Eat Food That Has a Nice Balance of Carbs, Fats, and Proteins

Fats and proteins slow down the body's absorption of starch and sugar into the blood stream. This prevents the body from going into Stress Mode to correct for blood sugars issues.

Foods rich in proteins include meat, fish, eggs, cheese, nuts, seeds (including nut & seed butters), lentils and other legumes, chick peas and other beans.

Foods rich in fats include eggs, butter, margarine, fatty meats, avocados, vegetable oils such as olive oil, cream, coconut milk, and high fat cheeses.

Something I Should Mention

This information is general. I get much more specific during patient visits. It's good to keep in mind that when we're highly active, we need more carbohydrates than if we've been working an office job all day.

Also, you may notice that I haven't mentioned fibre or vegetables in this article. It's not because they aren't important. I'd be happy to talk about them, or anything else you're curious about, in an appointment style setting.