

## BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS AND HEADACHE

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Migraineurs will be familiar with the terms “blood sugar balance” and “blood sugar levels”. But these are quite misleading terms for at the mention of “sugar”, it could be interpreted that sugar or sugary foods are needed to balance our blood levels. This could not be further from the truth, in fact, for the sake of our health, sugar is probably the last thing we need to eat to maintain desirable and healthy blood sugar balance. Our bodies need complex starchy carbohydrates, low GI foods and protein foods for desirable and healthy blood sugar levels.

Our bodies run on glucose, obtained mostly from the various carbohydrates that we eat. Those in the form of sweet, sugary foods or refined ‘white’ carbohydrates are broken down easily and quickly into glucose, have a high GI (glycaemic index) and circulate in the blood stream reaching all cells of the body. As a result if our blood sugar / glucose levels rise too quickly and steeply then chemical messengers are released in excess, the body’s response to try to bring levels back down to normal. Following this ‘high’, blood sugar levels then drop quickly and steeply, giving us energy dips and cravings for stimulants such as tea, coffee or fizzy drinks, and that sugary snack. Instead we need to be including low GI foods that release energy slowly and gradually into the blood stream, and so avoiding the ‘high peaks’ and ‘low dips’ of the roller coaster ride throughout the day that is associated with imbalanced blood sugar levels.

If you find that your energy levels dip mid-afternoon or after eating a meal you crave something sweet, you need a boost like coffee or tea to get you going in the morning, you generally crave sweet foods and refined carbohydrates such as white bread, pasta and cereals, then these are all indications that your blood sugar levels need balancing’.

It is good advice to eat regularly, try not to go more than 3 hours without eating, which means including snacks between meals. It is also important to never skip breakfast, the base for balancing our blood sugar levels throughout the day.

Avoid blood Sugar Balance ‘Peaks’ that over-stimulate the release of chemical messengers in excess in an effort to bring blood sugar back down to normal.

Include a small, low GI, starchy carbohydrate snack before bed such as 2 oatcakes. Also avoid drinks containing caffeine, try herbal tea instead.

Food is the fuel for our bodies, balancing our blood sugar levels can be one way that we start to take control of our health and to reduce frequency and severity of attacks.

It is important to remember that eating to balance blood sugar levels has an accumulative affect,

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and it can take several days before a real difference can be felt. Life is for living, and once changes to your diet show a positive improvement, then adopt the 80 / 20 principle, which allows for treats and social occasions.

When implementing any changes to your usual dietary regime, do so slowly and with caution, as otherwise this can be a trigger in itself for a migraine attack.

10 top tips to balance blood sugar levels:

1. Reduce or avoid sugar and sugary foods
2. Replace refined carbohydrates with whole grain alternatives
3. Eat regularly – at least every 3 hours and include protein foods with each meal
4. Never skip breakfast – include protein and complex starchy carbohydrates
5. Have a small complex carbohydrate snack before bed
6. Reduce or avoid stimulants such as tea, coffee and fizzy drinks
7. Drink enough water
8. Balance complex and starchy carbohydrates with protein (e.g. chicken, fish, eggs, vegetable proteins such as beans, lentils and chickpeas)
9. Include balance and variety in your diet
10. MAKE ANY CHANGES TO YOUR DIET SLOWLY AND GRADUALLY!

A word about stress: stress releases adrenalin, which then instructs glucose levels to rise, and will impact on blood sugar levels. If stress is a problem for you then do something that you enjoy every day and include exercise to enhance feelings of well-being.

Low GI snack ideas:

- Hummus with fresh crudités
- Nut butter with oatcakes
- Apple or pear with 4 – 6 natural nuts like walnuts, cashews or almonds (not salted & roasted)
- Boiled egg and whole grain crispbread
- Small handful of toasted sunflower and pumpkin seeds
- Natural 'live' bio yoghurt with fresh berries

TOP TIP – carry a healthy balanced, low sugar snack bar like Lyme Regis'Seven seeds and nut bar'

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or a 'Food Dr bar'

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