



The natural diabetes treatments the government won't tell you about

In November, the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) showed once again just how out of touch they all are...

The agency issued a blanket statement that "there is not enough evidence to suggest that any dietary supplement can help prevent or manage type 2 diabetes."¹

This conclusion is more than a little ironic. Especially coming from an organization whose mission is "to define, through rigorous scientific investigation, the usefulness and safety of complementary and alternative medicine interventions and their roles in improving health and health care."

And this new proclamation would be laughable—if it weren't for the confusion it will undoubtedly cause well-intentioned health practitioners.

Not to mention the damage it will cause diabetic patients. Who will miss out on the *real* and *necessary* health benefits supplements can provide.

Of course, this misguided statement is just the latest example of the reductionist, over-simplified perspective we have come to expect from the government. But it's not just misinformed. It's also dead wrong.

And downright *dangerous*.

The nutrient still desperately needed by 40 percent of diabetes patients

Just look at the outright dismissal of magnesium.

According to the November 2013 edition of the NCCAM's online *Clinical Digest*, "There is no evidence...that magnesium is beneficial in managing diabetes in the absence of magnesium deficiency."

Sounds simple enough. Except *nearly 40 percent of people with diabetes DO have magnesium deficiency!*

And even diabetics who aren't clinically deficient can benefit from magnesium.

One clinical trial found magnesium improved blood glucose and insulin resistance.² Another study found low magnesium levels increase risk of depression in diabetics.³ And, most importantly: When people with diabetes are critically ill, they're more likely to die if they have low magnesium levels.⁴

So how can the NCCAM just ignore all these benefits? Simple: They take a drug research approach to dietary supplements.

The type of research we need can only be done by clinicians trained in nutritional biochemistry, dietary assessment, and clinical nutrition therapy. And unfortunately you won't find such real experts in our government health agencies.

Which means countless natural therapies that show promise for diabetes aren't being used as effectively as they should be.

I'll tell you more about all of

those in just a moment. But first let me explain why a truly integrative approach to diabetes is so important.

What an "integrative approach" really means

By now you're probably used to the "natural know-it-alls" who refuse to ever consider drug therapy, no matter what the circumstances. If you ask me, these practitioners' blinders are just as big as the government's. And just as dangerous.

I choose to embrace true integrative/complementary medicine.

Instead of relying on one modality, I embrace all of them. Lifestyle, diet, nutritional supplements, herbal remedies, mind-body therapies, and, when appropriate, even pharmaceutical drugs.

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All the recommendations I make are based upon the scientific knowledge and medical experience I've garnered over the years. And sometimes the natural approaches I recommend actually go hand-in-hand with drugs.

In fact, that's what the term "complementary" is really supposed to mean! Using natural therapies in conjunction with mainstream drugs and procedures. To help enhance their potential. Or to offset any toxic side effects.

Sadly, this potential is often ignored by mainstream medicine.

But when it comes to managing diabetes, an integrative approach is absolutely essential. The stakes are just too high.

Diabetes is a primary risk factor for a number of chronic disabling conditions. Heart disease, stroke, circulatory disorders, kidney disease, and eye disease—just to name a few. And of course, diabetes itself can wreak havoc on your health on a daily basis.

It's also an increasingly common problem. The reasons why are a topic of hot debate. But it's safe to say our modern diet, poor beverage choices, sedentary lifestyle, and the misinformation handed out by the government-industrial-medical complex over the past several decades have stacked the deck against us.

So it's critical to approach diabetes from all available, effective avenues.

The good news is, there ARE effective treatments. And the cornerstone of my integrative approach for managing diabetes is metformin.

This popular diabetes "drug" is actually derived from a traditional herbal remedy—French lilac. And unlike a lot of pharmaceuticals,

metformin is safe and effective. In fact, its one major "side effect" is that it lowers the risk of dangerous cancers. It's also the only diabetes drug that has been shown to reduce all the long-term complications of diabetes.

So metformin is truly the best of both worlds. It's an effective natural remedy available as a pharmaceutical grade treatment. And it has many additional benefits. Plus, it has been around long enough now that it is available as a generic. Which means low cost and a proven safety profile.

But metformin certainly isn't the **ONLY** thing diabetics need.

I mentioned the benefits of magnesium earlier. And how a startling number of diabetics have low levels of this essential nutrient. So it should certainly be added to your daily regimen. But there are also a dozen more nutritional supplements no diabetes protocol should be without...

The nutritional side of diabetes

The NCCAM's dismissal of supplements for diabetes does more than just miss the boat. It also belies the agency's fundamental lack of understanding of human metabolism and nutrition in general terms.

In diabetes, your body is literally "starving in a sea of plenty." Blood sugar is high. But that sugar can't get into the tissue cells that need it.

Metformin is great for getting blood sugar into those cells. But we know certain nutritional approaches can help nourish cells further.

Getting sugar into the cells is critical so they can make their own energy and generate their own hydration. This process is supported by **coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10)**. CoQ10 is even more important for diabetics taking statin drugs because statins

reduce levels of this nutrient in the body. In fact, many of the well-known side effects of statins may result from this CoQ10 depletion. (For more info on recovering from the effects of statins, read my [Statin drug recovery plan](#) in the November 2013 issue of *Insiders' Cures*.) A good general dose of CoQ10 is 50 mg daily. Preferably in the form of ubiquinol, which is more readily absorbed. But people on statins or

recovering from statin poisoning may need 100 to 200 mg per day.

Another key player in cellular hydration is **red bush, or rooibos**, (400 mg/day). This herb from South Africa helps stimulate the cells to generate energy and hydration. And new research shows red bush can do even more to help with diabetes. It helps lower blood sugar and supports getting sugar into the muscle tissues.

(On page 8, I'll share some other exciting new research on red bush.)

Sutherlandia frutescens (400–500 mg/day) is another herb from South Africa. As an adaptogen, it helps support all the body's metabolic functions. Including blood sugar metabolism.

Blood circulation also needs to be a target of any diabetes treatment

Continued on page 4...

Herbs for diabetes

Many herbal remedies could be excellent candidates for natural management of diabetes. Unfortunately, the necessary research hasn't been carried out to develop real-world clinical protocols. So we have limited information to go on.

But the research that is available points to a number of different ways herbal remedies may work. They may directly drive blood sugar into tissues, stimulate insulin production, and/or block formation of sugar in the first place.

Here are some of the most promising herbs for diabetes.

- **Aloe vera** gel has a number of effects that may help people with diabetes. In a recent study, it helped obese people with early-stage diabetes or prediabetes lose weight and reduce insulin resistance.⁵
- **American ginseng** (*Panax quinquefolius*) may improve hyperglycemia and obesity associated with diabetes.⁶
- **Asian ginseng** (*Panax ginseng*) may improve glucose tolerance, reduce serum insulin levels, and promote weight loss.⁷
- **Bilberry** (huckleberry) contains potent antioxidants. It has been shown to protect against damage to the eye's retina—one of the most devastating side effects of diabetes.⁸ Animal studies have shown it also lowers blood sugar and improves insulin resistance.⁹
- **Bitter melon** (*Momordica charantia*) is sometimes called “vegetable insulin.” It contains at least three compounds that appear to help regulate blood sugar.¹⁰ It is a common remedy in Asia, Africa and Latin America.
- **Cinnamon bark**, as we reported in December, lowers blood glucose in people with Type II diabetes.¹¹
- **Curcumin**, a compound found in turmeric, may have a number of antidiabetic properties. Research suggests it improves insulin resistance, reduces body fat, and prevents or reduces diabetic retinopathy.^{12,13}
- **Fenugreek seeds** help stimulate insulin in the presence of high glucose levels. A recent, comprehensive review of published studies found fenugreek has a beneficial effect on glycemic control in people with diabetes.¹⁴
- **Gymnema sylvestre** is known as gurmar in Ayurvedic medicine, which means “destroyer of sugar.” Research shows extracts from this tropical plant reduce blood sugar in people with diabetes.¹⁵

As I said, there's simply not enough research on any of these herbs yet for me to feel confident making general recommendations about dosage to control diabetes. Dosages should be determined on an individual basis, according to your particular needs.

So if you are interested in adding any of the above to your integrative diabetes protocol, you should work closely with a practitioner skilled in nutritional medicine who can help determine the ideal doses for you. The American College for Advancement in Medicine (800-532-3688; www.acam.org) can help you find such a practitioner in your area.

Citations available online at www.DrMicozzi.com

plan. It's especially critical to ensure proper blood flow to the central nervous system and eyes. In diabetics, the blood vessels that supply these essential areas can be damaged. To help prevent that damage, look for nutrients that can cross the blood-brain barrier, such as the carotenoid **lutein** (5–15 mg/day) and herbs like **berberine** (300–400 mg/day). Berberine has the added benefit of lowering blood sugar—a double benefit for diabetics.

In all metabolic disorders, including diabetes, it's important to provide the body optimal nourishment. That means following a healthy diet. And getting enough of vitamins **A** (15,000 IU), **Bs** (9 mcg B12, 3 mg B6, 1-5 mg folic acid),

C (2,000 mg), **D** (5,000 IU) and **E** (100 IU).


In addition to magnesium, two other minerals are essential for supporting cellular metabolism in diabetics: **selenium** and **chromium**. And remember, you can't get optimal levels of these nutrients by following the RDAs alone. For selenium, 50 mcg per day is a good general dose. The chromium doses used in clinical studies vary. For diabetes, the daily amount ranges from 200-1,000 mcg, split into two or three doses. (Never exceed 1,000 mcg per day.)

You won't see mainstream medicine recommending this plan

Unfortunately, the government "experts" are still intent on

dismissing natural supplements. But the good news is, we don't need to wait for them to remove their blinders.

With this comprehensive guide, you finally have a truly integrative approach to diabetes management.

Yes, metformin is an indispensable part of any diabetes protocol. In a sea of modern pharmaceutical disasters of Titanic proportions, metformin is an effective, affordable drug. And it remains the cornerstone of my diabetes treatment plan. But it's even better when combined with the nutrients I've just described. Not to mention the helpful herbs I list in the sidebar on page 3. 

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From cold cure to cancer fighter

The emerging healing potential of vitamin C

If you need clear evidence that the government has no interest in real nutritional science—or in our health—look no further than vitamin C.

We've known for decades that vitamin C is a powerful immune booster. And it can prevent more than just colds. Science is overwhelmingly clear that vitamin C, when given intravenously, is a bona fide cancer fighter. Unfortunately, the "political scientists" in Washington, DC, are just as blind to this fact today as they were when I was working at the National Cancer Institute (NCI) 30 years ago.

As a senior investigator at NCI, at the outset of their research program on diet, nutrition, and cancer, I saw the potential for vitamin C firsthand. And I also saw how it was blatantly ignored.

My team and I were investigating which nutrients to select for definitive testing in human cancer prevention

studies. I witnessed a colleague bring the entire collection of research studies on the anticancer effects of vitamin C to our political bosses. She dropped the monumental pile on their desks—with a deafening thud. And it must have been deafening indeed, because the political bosses remained deaf to our arguments about selecting vitamin C for testing.

Instead NCI chased after then-obscure, unproven compounds such as beta-carotene. They made overnight anticancer celebrities of unqualified, ineffective nutrients—while the perfectly capable vitamin C waited in the wings.

Unfortunately, the evidence was never good for beta-carotene, as I tried to tell them. After wasting decades—not to mention hundreds of millions of tax dollars—all the NCI proved was that beta-carotene does not reduce

cancer. In fact, it even *increases* it in some populations!

Wondering why the government would ignore the science and throw its weight behind ineffective and harmful remedies instead? As always, you can find the answer by following the money. The NCI scientific advisory board included members from the industry that makes and sells synthetic beta-carotene!

As for vitamin C, it lost out for ridiculous and political reasons. Namely, the NCI felt it had been given a "bad name" by Linus Pauling, who had brought so much attention to it.

Yes, you read that right. The fact that a two-time Nobel prize winner was such a strong and vocal advocate of the scientific truth was actually a mark *against* vitamin C in the eyes of the NCI.

But facts are stubborn things, and the truth will always win out. Eventually, researchers persisted and I was able to bring different lines of research together that established the effective use of vitamin C to treat cancer patients. I reported on these findings in August 2013, in our first anniversary “Breakthrough” Issue of *Insiders' Cures*.

Unfortunately, you can't reap the vitamin's anticancer benefits by drinking more orange juice or popping a pill. The doses required for such intensive therapy are only achieved by continuous IV infusion of vitamin C directly into the bloodstream. In the August issue, I also shared the details of the various kinds of research studies that allowed us to determine the correct dose and rate of infusion needed to maintain effective levels in the blood.

And just in case there's any remaining doubt, studies have shown that these levels of vitamin C in the blood are safe and well tolerated by patients. Especially when compared to toxic intravenous chemotherapy treatments.

To treat cancer, first you have to understand it

Aside from long-standing, half-baked, and oversimplified theories

about “antioxidant” effects, several other studies have proven vitamin C's numerous specific anticancer effects. It supports the immune system to stop cancer, limits the multiplication of cancer cells, and hinders the growth of blood vessels that support the growth of cancerous tumors.¹

But the NCI is missing vitamin C's huge potential in cancer care by taking a narrow and oversimplified view of cancer “treatment.” In their minds, if a treatment doesn't kill cancer cells outright (a property known as “cytotoxicity”), then it's worthless. But they're missing all the other anticancer effects that nutrients and natural plant compounds have. That leaves us only with the worst, most toxic forms of cancer treatment. (Think chemotherapy and radiation.)


New research drives the point home

A recent study on IV vitamin C focuses on the inflammatory component of cancer.² When cancer tumors are growing, there's typically an inflammatory response in the local area. Elevated inflammation can worsen prognosis and shorten survival times in many forms of cancer.³

The new study recognizes vitamin C can play a part in both preventing

and treating cancer. But it has to be given at doses significantly higher than the ridiculous RDAs. These researchers treated 45 patients with lymphoma or prostate, breast, bladder, pancreatic, lung, thyroid, or skin cancers with high-dose, IV vitamin C.

In three-quarters of the patients, vitamin C treatment resulted in decreased levels of tumor markers. Which suggests that, over the long term, treatment with IV vitamin C would improve prognosis and survival rates in cancer patients. And the authors believe these effects could also benefit other inflammation-related diseases too. That finding could be huge, since inflammation may be at the root of countless diseases—ranging from asthma and sleep apnea to diabetes and atherosclerosis.

Just think of all the progress we could have made in preventing and treating cancer (and other diseases) if the NCI had bothered to listen to that initial thud of research 30 years ago. None of these new findings would be surprising. The only surprise is that it took so long and wasted so many years, taxpayer dollars, and lives to start to understand vitamin C's full potential. 

Citations available online at www.DrMicozzi.com

The future of men's health growing in your yard

As a young child in Philadelphia, each Spring, I would go with my uncle and his friends from the Department of Public Works to Cobbs Creek Park on the western reserve of the over-crowded city. Even then, the term “public works” was becoming an oxymoron. Case in point: The task at hand? To rid the park of dandelions. But these workers knew better than to

toss the weeds in the trash. Instead, they saved the leaves and used them to make fresh salads.

Of course, as far as history goes, my boyhood wasn't all that long ago. But the men who brought home these tasty leaves knew something people have known for centuries, in countries across the world.

Dandelions can do far more good

in our bodies than they can in a landfill. In fact, recently, researchers have been investigating a novel use for the lowly dandelion. This line of research is so new it hasn't been picked up yet by either mainstream medical researchers or the “natural know-it-all”. More on this brand new breakthrough in just a minute.

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But first, let me give you a little insight into dandelion's remarkable healing potential.

More reasons to ditch the weed killer

Dandelion gets its name from the serrated shape of its leaves. The French called it *dent de lion*, literally "tooth of lion." But its other French name is more indicative of its medicinal use: *pis-en-lit* ("wet the bed") to describe its diuretic effects. Indeed dandelion has been used as a folk remedy in Europe, Asia, and the Americas to improve urine production.

As a traditional folk remedy, dandelion was also used to detoxify the blood, support liver health and treat various dermatologic disorders and systemic illnesses. Today, scientific studies substantiate the ability of dandelion to induce liver enzymes that metabolize and detoxify blood and tissues.¹

As early as 1931, research demonstrated that dandelion was also a "choleagogue," meaning it stimulates release of bile from the liver's biliary system and gall bladder into the intestines. This is a critical step in the body's process of digesting and absorbing essential fatty acids and fat-soluble nutrients into the blood. That's probably why many traditional European digestive drinks contain "bitters" (herbs like dandelion)—to stimulate the liver and the bile ducts for better digestion and metabolism.

Modern research points to new uses

Modern science shows a number of other health benefits of dandelion. Here are a few of the most notable.

- **Heart health.** Dandelion reduces the risk of atherosclerosis, a cause of many cardiovascular diseases. Its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties

are thought responsible for this effect. In addition, dandelion reduces several risk factors for heart disease, such as obesity and hyperlipidemia.²

- **Blood sugar control.** People with blood sugar issues may find relief in dandelion, which appears to decrease insulin resistance in tissues.³ It also may stimulate the pancreas to make more insulin.⁴ That would help the pancreas avoid a condition known as "beta-cell burn-out." This condition causes constant stimulation of pancreatic cells, which may be a risk factor for pancreatic cancer.
- **Gastrointestinal health.** Dandelion, together with other herbs, has been shown to drastically improve the symptoms of chronic colitis.⁵

Dandelion in cancer care

Some research also suggests dandelion may be able to stop breast and prostate cancer cells, though exactly how is unclear.⁶ But perhaps more importantly, dandelion may fight angiogenesis, the process that creates new blood vessels in the body.⁷ It's what allows cancerous tumors to survive and grow. And as I've said before, stopping angiogenesis in its tracks is the future of cancer care.

This approach prevents cancer cells from robbing the body's blood supply to become cancer tumors. It is a much less toxic way of stopping cancer than are typical chemotherapeutic agents. Those treatments poison your normal cells together with cancer cells, which is what makes them so damaging to the body.

As you can see, dandelion already has an impressive roster of benefits associated with it. But recently, this lowly weed has caught the eye of cutting-edge botanical chemists because it appears dandelion

phytosterols can improve prostate health in men. But that's actually just the start of how dandelion benefits men's health.

Breakthrough combination gives aging men a vitality boost

A recent Korean study found that an extract of dandelion—together with red bush or rooibos (with which you're familiar from some past articles here in *Insiders' Cures*)—supports a man's innate ability to produce testosterone.⁸

Testosterone production can falter with age. Which is why you see ads for dangerous and useless drugs to fix "Low T" everywhere you look these days. But this dandelion–red bush combination was able to boost testosterone production naturally. It also improves vitality in cells, both in lab animal experiments and in human clinical trials.

In fact, men taking a dandelion–red bush supplement showed marked improvements in physical activity, vitality, and measures of longevity *after just 3 to 4 months!*

Unfortunately you won't find such a supplement on the open market... not just yet, at least. But I will keep you updated regarding more developments about a real "anti-aging" supplement in coming issues of *Insiders' Cures*.

In the meantime, you can start incorporating dandelion into your daily diet starting today.

And this advice goes for both men and women. After all, dandelion is one of the richest sources of carotenoids, which are important for the brain, nerves, and the eyes. This versatile plant also provides loads of fiber, minerals, protein, vitamins, and trace elements—more than either lettuce or spinach.


Not sure how to use dandelions? Well, all parts of the dandelion plant

are edible—flower, leaves, stems, and roots. So try tossing them in salads—alone or with lettuces, shallots (another French favorite), or chives. The leaves may also be boiled and drained, seasoned with pepper and other spices, and moistened with butter or olive oil. Or try adding a handful of the leaves to soups.

But for the men's health benefits I described earlier, use the recipe on the right. It's an easy and delicious way to replicate the combination studied by those cutting-edge Korean researchers.

You can find dandelion greens in specialty stores and farmers

markets. But you might want to ask your grocer to carry them. Many supermarkets have started sections for local produce and requests.

And of course, this Spring when dandelions start poking up from the ground, feel free to put them to good use. Just make sure you avoid picking and eating dandelions from areas where you aren't sure about pesticide use. Your best bet is to avoid using pesticides on your own lawn, and stick to the dandelions that grow there. That way you can eat your dandelions and help protect a healthy environment at the same time. 

Citations available online at www.DrMicozzi.com

Make your own healthy "anti-aging" tea

Ingredients

1 ounce dandelion root, roasted and ground

1 ounce leaves and stems, roasted and ground

2/3 ounce fennel seeds

2/3 ounce mint leaves

1 packet Red Joe red bush (or rooibos) powder

Instructions

Steep mixture in one cup of hot water for 10 minutes. Strain and enjoy.

ASK *the* INSIDER

Blood sugar basics: Too high, too low—and how to stay "just right"

Q. I've read your explanations of diabetes, but can you explain how it relates to hypoglycemia? Do the natural remedies that balance blood sugar for diabetics work for people with hypoglycemia as well?

A. Hypoglycemia is a condition of low blood sugar, which is essentially the opposite of the high blood sugar that occurs in diabetes. That's the simple explanation. But since no doctor has probably ever taken the time to help you fully understand your condition, let me give you more details. Fair warning: it's a bit complicated.

The simple and complex carbs we eat are digested and metabolized into sugars in the blood (glucose). Glycogen is a form of sugar stored in

muscle and other tissues. This stored sugar is another source of blood sugar. When the body signals that blood sugar is low and you are not eating, or when you are burning sugar rapidly as during intense exercise, the tissues release glycogen into the blood.

The blood transports sugar to the tissue cells—where it's used for metabolism. The cells essentially "burn" the sugars to make energy and water. This is the source of all the energy and most of the water in your cells. The blood also supplies sugar to the brain for energy.

When the tissues tell the body they need more sugar, the pancreas releases insulin (an endocrine hormone) into the blood. Insulin is like a key that opens the tissue cells and lets the

sugar move from the blood into the tissues.

Type 1 diabetics are unable to produce insulin. That means they can't get sugar from the blood into the tissues. Since the tissue cells cannot get the sugar to metabolize for energy, the body breaks down fats instead. Unfortunately, that causes byproducts that are toxic and can lead to coma and even death.

But if someone with type 1 diabetes is given too much insulin, it can drive all the sugar into the cells. That leaves too little sugar in the blood and causes low blood sugar, also known as hypoglycemia.

In type 2, or "insulin-resistant" diabetes, the pancreas *is* able to

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make insulin. There is insulin in the blood, but the tissues resist allowing the blood sugar into the tissue cells anyway. This can signal the pancreas to produce *even more* insulin. The result is even higher insulin levels in the blood.

Type 2 diabetics can also be given insulin and other drugs to “force” more sugar from the blood into the tissues. But too much insulin, or other drugs, can also lead to hypoglycemia.

Hypoglycemia is most immediately a problem for the brain, which needs a constant supply of both oxygen and sugar since it is very metabolically active and sensitive. Up to one-third of the blood and sugar in the body goes to the brain. If the brain lacks blood, oxygen, or sugar, it can become unconscious and go into a coma in just two to three minutes. Brain damage ensues just a few minutes after that.

Of course, most people with hypoglycemia are not in such dire straits. In fact, anyone who skips meals can suffer hypoglycemia because there is simply not enough sugar available to get into the blood. On the other hand, eating simple sugars and certain carbs (unlike the fructose in fruits) causes blood glucose to rise too rapidly. This rapid rise in turn can trigger the pancreas to release excess insulin into the blood, clearing out the blood sugar and causing reactive hypoglycemia.

I talk a lot about herbs that lower blood sugar because that's the problem that concerns most people (see the sidebar on page 3). But the same herbs may help people with hypoglycemia as well. That's because, unlike most drugs, natural

remedies generally help the body **balance** itself. And the whole point of normal metabolism is to keep blood sugar in proper balance.

So herbs that affect blood sugar are unlikely to have the potential side effects of insulin or drugs that can potentially drive blood sugar too low and cause hypoglycemia. Unfortunately, we don't know more because the people who should be studying these remedies (and who are paid with our tax dollars to do so) stubbornly refuse. Read the full story on page 1 for more shameful details.

Natural digestion solutions keep things moving

Q. I have struggled with indigestion and constipation for years. Are there any safe and natural ways to address those digestion problems?

A. Absolutely. There are several, but I'll focus on a few of my favorites. For 12 years I've focused a large part of my own research on a plant called red bush, or rooibos, native to South Africa. One of the most impressive effects of red bush is that it improves hydration all the way down to a cellular level. Good hydration is critical to preventing constipation. And doctors and South Africans who drink red bush say it works wonders on digestion. Specifically, it helps digestive complaints such as indigestion and constipation.

And red bush is safe. In fact, it's so safe mothers in South Africa give red bush tea to their infants because it helps with colic. From my experience, red bush is actually safe to drink instead of plain water—all day, every day. (A new red bush formulation I helped develop, called Red Joe, is available at www.drnicozzi.com.)

Another effective digestion aid is peppermint—which explains the ubiquitous “after-dinner” mints at restaurants. But instead of mint-flavored, sugar-filled candies, I recommend peppermint in the form of a dietary supplement or as a tea.

Ginger, as well as verbena and linden teas may also help with digestion. In fact, I have some personal experience with the digestive benefits of these teas. They've been used in my family for at least five generations. But watch out for green and black teas which contain caffeine, tannins and oxalic acid—and can disrupt digestion.

Does dark chocolate have a “dark side”?

Q. You wrote about eating dark chocolate and said to make sure to get chocolate without added calories, fats and sugar. Where would you get such a thing?

A. The key to reaping the benefits of dark chocolate is to maximize the cacao content while minimizing the sugar and other ingredients. The plant biochemicals in cacao are great for your body, but those positives can be negated when you overload them with excess calories and sugar. The good news is, health food producers and retailers seem to have caught on, and now low (or no) sugar, high-cacao chocolates and cocoa powders are available in virtually all grocery stores. Look for at least 65% up to 85% cacao content. For hot chocolate use low-fat milk (1%) which will make a rich brew. No need to sweeten. Remember many people like the taste of darker chocolates once they try them (see the *Daily Dispatch* “Why bitter is better” from January 10, 2014). 