

## The Glycemic Index: Fad Diet or IR Solution?

What do women with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS), obesity, Metabolic Syndrome, and Diabetes (Type II) have in common?

### Insulin Resistance (IR)

What is IR? If your cells are insulin resistant, that means sugar is sitting in your blood. To push that sugar into your cells, the body makes more insulin. What insulin isn't used spends its time in your blood, too. Soon, you're turning the sugar into fat. IR is a recipe for obesity.

Right now, the standard treatment for IR is to take insulin-sensitizing medication like Metformin. I have PCOS, so I began looking for a way to manage IR without medication. I found that many doctors see improvement in insulin levels when their patients lose even five pounds. Ok, so the answer is weight loss. That sounds simple.

The tricky part is that IR makes weight loss harder. If you can't lose weight, you can't improve your body's use of insulin. If you can't improve your body's use of insulin, you can't lose weight. Are you dizzy yet? It's a Catch-22 or a riddle of epic proportions. I knew if I failed to find answers, my thighs would reach epic proportions, too.

This logic led me to a discovery. There are many people with Type II Diabetes (which is basically severe IR) who manage their Diabetes (and need for insulin) through diet. If they can manage help control their insulin through diet, why couldn't women with PCOS or Metabolic Syndrome manage IR completely?

Is Metformin even necessary if a grip on IR can be maintained through diet? Can Type II Diabetes be prevented if IR is treated? I can't answer that for every woman. Metformin is a good starting point for many, but the list of side effects has encouraged me to use Metformin as a tool and not a solution. That's where the Glycemic Index (GI) Diet comes in.

So, what's the GI Diet (better known as a Low GI Diet)? First of all, it's not a diet. It's a way of life. Some people call it a fad, and for some people, it is. For people with IR, it may be a life saver. The Low GI Diet is based on the way some people with Diabetes manage insulin without medication. They exclude certain foods from their diets to control sugar levels.

How does a Low GI Diet work with IR? Foods that are *low* on the Glycemic Index Scale are digested slowly. The sugar gets into the blood in smaller amounts, so insulin is released slowly (Allen, 2005). Foods that are high on the GI Scale digest quickly. A big burst of sugar into your blood causes a big burst of insulin. The more

sugar is involved, the more insulin is released. The more insulin is released, the less friendly your cells become to that insulin. Think of it like watching too many horror movies.

By choosing foods that are low on the Glycemic Index, you help your body to pace itself. You're likely to stay full longer, and you're less likely to suffer the rising and falling insulin levels. Over time, studies show that a low GI diet can help sensitize the body to insulin which leads to weight loss and even better use of insulin.

If you have PCOS or you've already been diagnosed with Insulin Resistance (IR), you're probably familiar with Metformin and the nausea it causes. Since low carbohydrate diets to help combat the nausea, you may already be experimenting with Low GI meals.

What's involved with a Low GI diet? I recommend picking up a book for a full explanation. There are Low GI cookbooks and instruction books to help you understand what it is and how to use it. To help you get started, here's a simplified rundown:

GOOD:

High fiber vegetables  
Legumes  
Fruit  
Lean protein  
Heart-healthy fats  
Whole grains

BAD:

Simple carbohydrates  
Refined flour  
Refined sugars

This isn't an all-inclusive list, but it's a start. You need to be willing to learn how the Glycemic Index works in order to take full advantage. Some fruits, for example, are higher on the Glycemic Index than others, so you also need to be careful how you combine foods so your whole meal is insulin-friendly.

On a side note, if you're overweight and having trouble losing weight, see your doctor, especially if you have any combination of these symptoms:

- Abdominal obesity
- Absent or irregular periods
- High blood pressure
- Insulin resistance
- low good cholesterol
- High bad cholesterol
- Infertility
- Skin tags
- Diabetes Type II
- Excess body hair

- Thinning scalp hair
- Thyroid problems

These can be symptoms of Metabolic Syndrome and PCOS. Your doctor can help you take control of your symptoms.

So that's the short version. If you're interested in starting a low GI diet to help with you IR, PCOS, Metabolic Syndrome, etc., there are plenty of books out there to help you. Your doctor is also an excellent resource. The important thing to remember is that a Low GI diet is not a fad diet, and it's not a temporary diet. It's a lifestyle change that may prolong your life.

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