

# Anthroposophic aspects of diabetes treatment

By: Ross Rentea, MD

When it is generally acknowledged that high blood sugar, obesity, high blood pressure and high blood fats have reached epidemic proportions, it might behoove us to ask whether, beyond the individual predilections, might we be exposed early in life to cultural factors that predispose many of us to exhibit these prevalent problems later in life.

Significantly, Rudolf Steiner explained in the 1920s<sup>1</sup>: “Imagine that you are stressing the memory capacity of the child excessively around the ninth or tenth year of life, that memory is used too much as a means in education. The consequences of this will show themselves only when the human being is in his thirties or forties or even later. Then the person will become either a sufferer of rheumatism or diabetes. Precisely when memory is used inappropriately around the ninth or tenth year of life, then this overwhelming of memory in childhood will show itself later in excessive deposits of metabolic products ... On the other hand, when the child is required to use too little memory – when we are appealing too little to the child’s ability to remember – then we will call forth in later life a tendency for inflammatory processes of all sorts. To understand how the bodily conditions of one epoch of life are the consequences of the spiritual-soul conditions of another life-stage is one of the most important things that we must realize.” (Freely translated.)

We are practicing plenty of that in the rearing of our children. Over-intellectualization, unreasonable expectations of mental performance, now often beginning with kindergarten, leads to the metabolic syndrome on the one hand. And on the other hand, lack of a rhythmic lifestyle, starting with irregular meals, irregular sleep times, stresses and anxieties for children living between multiple families, can lead to the later life inflammations. Not surprisingly, underlying obesity, as a fat deposit, and diabetes, as a sugar deposit, scientists are finding a pervasive inflammatory process.

Ultimately the excesses of childhood reveal themselves as leading to a generalized state of Ego (the personal individuality) exhaustion where, sadly enough, this results in a culture where a majority of adults begin their mature years in a chronically overwhelmed state – literally not taking hold of our bodies (let alone of the social requirements around us) – and these untended physiological processes fall apart and result in disease. It is a scenario like this that points out the true incalculable importance of preventive hygiene and holistic lifestyle changes.

The treatment of diabetes in the larger sense (whether treatment refers to medications or nutritional changes) needs to focus on strengthening the Ego in addition to attempting to affect the physical body in a more narrow sense by lowering sugar or burning fat. Inspired by Rudolf Steiner’s work there are several creative modalities that we can use along with conventional therapies. The common denominator for all these ideas is a reawakening of the personal individuality.

A classical indication given by Rudolf Steiner is the use of rosemary. Initially he recommended baths with a strong amount of rosemary oil with the admonition that it should be clearly smelled by the patient so that one would be aware of the herb through one’s sense organs during the therapeutic bath. Various modalities have been developed over the years to make this application more effective, for example the oil dispersion baths. The rosemary plant exhibits the principles that we are considering

above in an exemplary fashion. It takes the forces of fragrance and warmth contained in its etheric oils back into the plant instead of dispersing them generally into the surrounding environment the way lavender does, for example. The plant does not allow its life-forces to be used in developing large leaves or flowers. But rather, it concentrates all its strength towards the inside and results in the typical woody, small, shrubby appearance that is so characteristic of this plant. Interestingly, in the last several years rosemary has been found to be a powerful anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant. Research has shown, however, that it is ineffective if it doesn't have an appropriate quality control shown in the standardization of its most active ingredients of Rosmarinic and Carnosinic acids. These new insights make it reasonable then to use rosemary as an oral nutritional supplement also.

For Ego-strengthening, salt scrubs can be used to invigorate the entire periphery. Often the salt is mixed with rosemary as a fragrance and its effect is thus considerably amplified.

To overcome the chronic exhaustion of life forces stemming from the above-mentioned educational "headyness," remedies made from roots are very helpful. While it is beyond the scope of this brief article to fully explain the connection, it can be intuitively seen that there is a correspondence between the herbal root system that connects the plant with the surrounding earth and the human nerve-sense organization that connects us in turn with our surrounding world. Root extracts have been known since antiquity as valued tonics or as specific healers for various conditions. A gentian or curcumin tincture help through their spiciness and bitterness to overcome stagnant intestinal processes, particularly such common conditions accompanying diabetes as an overly slow emptying of the stomach. More recently, other root formulations from plants such as withania or rhodiola have been shown to be particularly energizing and restorative.

Anthroposophical medicine places great emphasis on the work with various forms of the mineral quartz, silica, whether in concentrated powder or potentized forms. Silicates help not only in restoring the normal function of sense organs that can be damaged by abnormal glucose levels but also help in normalizing the metabolism of the sugar overload.

Several substances are involved in helping the Ego either connect itself more strongly with the body or helping it to relax and go to sleep. If calcium in general can be seen as having more calming effects, which is one of the reasons why it can be used against allergies and sleeplessness, then phosphorous has an invigorating, awakening effect. In the proper formulation, in a very dilute form, phosphorous can help the spiritual self to better take hold of metabolic processes.

Lastly, the mistletoe plant deserves some attention here. In traditional herbal medicine it used to be known as a blood pressure lowering, fertility enhancing plant that was also occasionally used in the treatment of epilepsy. Rudolf Steiner made the cardinal discovery a century ago that prepared properly and given in injectable form it had cancer fighting abilities. The mistletoe demonstrates through its peculiar growth rhythms that it emphasizes at all times its own "individuality." Contrary to most other plants, it has a dormant state in the summer and develops its berries around New Year's time in the winter. It would make sense to use the mistletoe, but this time in tincture form, as an extract, in order to reengage the Ego in the body by forcing it to overcome the "contrariness" of this herb. Not surprisingly, there is an African tradition mentioning mistletoe therapy in diabetes.<sup>2</sup> In experimental animal studies mistletoe treatment could not show a direct sugar level lowering effect but it had a positive influence on diabetes associated symptoms, such as hyperphagia (overeating) and polydipsia (over-drinking).

Clearly, any form of lifestyle change that results in an increased "mastery" of the Ego over the physical

body aligns itself with the anthroposophical understanding of treating diabetes. Ultimately, the age-old observation that aerobic exertion lowers blood sugar is nothing more, nor less, than the reality of the Will taking hold of the metabolic forces. Leading a rhythmical life, with structured meals at the same time every day, is not only in harmony with the well-known biorhythms of insulin secretion (a high and low every 15 minutes and every 90 minutes ) but demonstrates the benefits when the “I” dictates when and how much is to be ingested.

Ultimately, the ideal will be achieved where the Ego will have the strength to overcome its challenges through meditative-spiritual practices. Until then, however, we have to support this goal with physical substances that support the Ego on all the levels that it chooses to work on, not just the physical one.

1. Rudolf Steiner, lecture of 5.21.1923
2. Matthias Girke, Merkurstab, December 2002