

Increasing your insulin sensitivity

3 essential tips for reclaiming the life you deserve



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 **Byram**
HEALTHCARE

Welcome!

If we haven't met, it's so great to connect with you! I'm Lauren Bongiorno, T1D since 2000 and founder of Risely Health.



At Risely, we understand that living with type 1 diabetes can sometimes feel like a never-ending cycle of numbers and frustration. But there's a way to break free from that cycle—and increasing your insulin sensitivity is a big part of it.

Historically, insulin resistance has been a conversation reserved for type 2 diabetes, gestational diabetes, and pre-diabetes. But in reality, it plays a significant role in the lives of those with type 1 diabetes as well. Here's the deal: when we talk about increasing insulin sensitivity, what we're really aiming for is to improve how well our bodies absorb insulin. This not only makes blood sugars easier to manage, but it also lowers the risk of future health complications.

Insulin sensitivity refers to how responsive your body's cells are to insulin. Higher sensitivity means your cells use insulin more efficiently, helping to lower blood glucose levels faster. On the flip side, lower sensitivity—or insulin resistance—makes it harder to manage blood sugars.

To put it simply, if you need 1 unit of insulin to cover every 10 grams of carbs, you're more insulin resistant than if you need 1 unit to cover 15 grams of carbs. Sensitivity can vary between individuals and can change based on lifestyle and dietary factors.

Maybe you've noticed that insulin resistance makes it difficult to eat carbs without seeing high blood sugars or that it leads to more frequent out-of-range numbers. You're not alone. But knowing these things is different from taking action to change them. And that's where we come in.

Maybe you've been on your own trying to boost your insulin sensitivity, but haven't seen the results you were hoping for. Or perhaps this is the first time you're hearing about insulin sensitivity as part of your T1D journey. Wherever you are on this path, I understand that feeling of wondering, "Where do I even begin?"

Let's start by unraveling what insulin resistance really means—and why improving your insulin sensitivity can be one of the most transformative steps you take for your health.

Insulin resistance is a complex issue, influenced by a blend of hormone imbalances, stress, body composition (especially excess fat stored in tissues not designed for it), diet, and physical activity.

By taking steps to increase your insulin sensitivity, you unlock significant benefits:

1. Increase insulin-to-carb ratio & correction factor
2. Better overall blood sugar control
3. Smoother post-meal blood sugars
4. Quicker recovery from high blood sugars
5. Long-term prevention of complications like heart disease, neuropathy, retinopathy, and kidney disease—conditions that account for over 50% of deaths related to type 1 diabetes.

These aren't things you're likely to learn about in a typical 15-minute doctor's appointment, but they are essential tools in your T1D toolbox. Consider this the day you find the root of what's holding you back!

Our health coaching model is designed to help you identify the root causes of what's holding you back, learn your patterns, and discover strategies that work for you.

You don't have to navigate this alone. Together, we'll work to increase your insulin sensitivity, making your day-to-day management easier and helping you reclaim the life you deserve. Let's take the first step towards that freedom and confidence today.

Before we dive in

Pause. Reflect on your relationship with insulin.

This might be something you haven't considered until now, but the mental side of managing type 1 diabetes is just as important as the physical. The journey to a healthy relationship with insulin is a crucial part of this mental road, and it looks different for everyone.

If you're feeling like your relationship with insulin is on shaky ground right now—whether it's due to fears of going low or concerns about weight gain—I encourage you to focus on these emotional factors first. Shifting your focus to increasing insulin sensitivity can sometimes be triggering, and your emotional well-being matters.

Let's be clear: this guide is not about reducing your insulin intake because insulin is bad. Quite the opposite. Insulin is essential—it's what keeps us alive. Our cells, liver, muscles, and brain all rely on it to function at their best.

When we talk about increasing insulin sensitivity, we're doing so because it can help your body use insulin more effectively, making blood sugars easier to manage and reducing the risk of future complications.



The takeaway:
Intention behind action matters.

Risely's 3-part sensitivity model

1. Nutrition



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Nutrition

Insulin sensitivity hack: Eating low carb might be doing more harm than good.

At first glance, a high-fat/low-carb diet might seem like a no-brainer for managing type 1 diabetes. After all, carbs can cause blood sugars to fluctuate, so reducing carb intake should mean fewer spikes, right? Plus, high-fat diets are often praised for promoting ketosis, where the body burns fat instead of glucose.

But type 1 diabetes is complex, and a one-dimensional approach like cutting carbs doesn't address the whole picture.

- Dietary fat plays a significant role in insulin resistance, a factor that's often overlooked. Research, including findings from the Diabetes Control and Complications Trial, has shown a strong link between long-term fat intake and blood glucose control. Participants who consumed lower amounts of fat (around 62g/day) had better A1C outcomes (7.14%) compared to those with higher fat intake (around 120g/day), whose A1C averaged 7.47%.
- This tells us that fat intake can have a big impact on blood sugar management, not just carbs.
- If you've reduced your carbs but are still seeing high blood sugars, this could be why. A high-fat diet can lead to excess fatty acids blocking insulin from doing its job, leaving glucose in your bloodstream and keeping your numbers elevated.

The past few years we've coached SO many people who are in what we like to call "low carb recovery."

After a period of eating low carb, you might notice that your blood sugar isn't staying as stable as you'd like. You might feel restricted in your food choices, and when you do try to add carbs back into your diet, it feels like your insulin needs skyrocket, leading to more frequent spikes.

If you're feeling frustrated by not being able to enjoy a sandwich with friends or noticing that even low-carb foods are requiring more insulin than before, you're not alone. You don't have to stay stuck—there's a way to nourish your body and find more balance.

The key is in nutritional timing, nutritional density, macro balance, and nutritional quantity.

If you're seeking a balanced, sustainable approach without extremes, here are four essential tips to get you started on the right path:

- ✓ Fiber-rich carbs digest more slowly, leading to a lower glycemic impact. Embracing these can help maintain more stable blood sugars while nourishing your body.
- ✓ Be mindful of fats (like nut butter, oils, etc.): Fats play an important role in your diet but can influence insulin sensitivity. Being aware of your intake can help you fine-tune your nutrition for better balance.
- ✓ Instead of thinking about what to remove, consider what you can ADD. Incorporate more whole plants, fruits, and vegetables into your meals.
- ✓ In a world full of conflicting advice, it's crucial to listen to your own body. Simplify the external noise and let your body guide you. You have the wisdom within to create a balanced approach to your health.

Risely's 3 part sensitivity model

2. Exercise



Exercise

While any type of movement is great for our bodies, if our goal is to boost insulin sensitivity, it's important to move with intention.

Remember these 3 things during exercise:

1. DON'T JUST DO CARDIO

Cardio is fantastic for heart health and immediate glucose burning, but to really boost your baseline insulin sensitivity, add weight training to the mix.

Strength training enhances insulin sensitivity because muscles, the second-largest consumer of glucose in our bodies, absorb 20-30% of glucose when insulin is present.

Not sure where to start? Begin with bodyweight exercises like lunges, squats, and push-ups—they're simple yet effective.

**Check the end of this guide for a T1D strength training resource!*

2. LIVE YOUR DAILY S'S

What you do outside the gym matters just as much! Think steps, stairs, and squats—every bit counts. You don't need fancy gadgets to track your daily steps; if you have an iPhone, the "Health" app can do it for you.

Look at your current average and set a goal to increase it each week. Opt for stairs instead of elevators, especially before meals—it can make a real difference. For those with desk jobs, take 2-3 breaks a day for what we call #sugarsquats. Just stop, drop for 50! No equipment needed, just your body weight.

3. MOVE BECAUSE YOU LOVE YOURSELF

Exercise shouldn't be about changing who you are but enhancing what's already within you. Realign your reasons for movement: to boost insulin sensitivity, stabilize blood sugar, build muscle, challenge your mindset, and remind yourself that your potential is limitless. Your journey with T1D doesn't have to be one of restriction—it's about reclaiming the life you deserve with confidence and grace.

Risely's 3 part sensitivity model

3. Hormones



Hormones

When we think about managing insulin and blood sugar, nutrition and exercise are often top of mind. But there's a critical piece of the puzzle that's easy to overlook: hormones.

Stress, menstrual cycles, and sleep are the behind-the-scenes players that can significantly impact your insulin resistance, either working for you or against you. So, how well do you really understand the influence these factors have on your body?

At Risely Health, we believe that diabetes isn't a math problem to be solved - it's an experience to be managed. This means taking the time to care for **YOU**—not just your diabetes.

What are you doing to take care of **YOU**?

Here are some simple self care habits you can implement throughout your week:

- ✓ Meditation
- ✓ Journaling in the Diabetic Health Journal
- ✓ No social media past 8 pm
- ✓ Letting go of relationships/work in your life that adds stress
- ✓ Getting 8 hours of sleep every night
- ✓ Taking rest days to let your body recover after intense workout
- ✓ Eat your meals sitting down
- ✓ Implement a morning journaling or gratitude jotting routine

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Bonus

You might be thinking about this....

FAQs

Below are some popular questions we often get asked by our coaching clients that we want to share with you as well!

When I give myself insulin, a lot of times I feel like it's not even working. Why is that?

The reasons can vary, and it's important to approach it with curiosity and a process of elimination. First, it might be time to update your insulin ratios. Our bodies change, and so do our insulin needs. Another possibility is lipohypertrophy or scar tissue from injecting or pumping into the same areas too frequently. This one's an easy fix—start rotating your injection sites more often. Yes, we all have our favorite spots, but giving each area a break (think: thighs, hips, stomach, arms) can make a big difference.

Lastly, if your insulin is working but your blood sugars are slow to respond, insulin resistance could be the culprit.

Can't I just take medication designed for T2Ds to help with sensitivity?

Before adding any new medication to your routine, it's crucial to consult with your doctor. That said, educating yourself about the potential side effects of medications like GLP-1 Receptor Agonists, Metformin, SGLT-2 Inhibitors, or Amylin Analogues is equally important. Taking full ownership of your health means recognizing that while these medications can offer some support in managing blood sugars or sensitivity, they're often temporary fixes and might introduce new challenges.

Remember, your body and your T1D journey are unique. For some, these medications may be necessary under specific circumstances, but they're not the only path to achieving balance.

Does decreasing my insulin mean my insulin sensitivity is increasing?

Yes, but it's a bit more nuanced. If you're eating fewer carbs or skipping them altogether today, your total insulin needs will naturally decrease. However, that doesn't necessarily mean your insulin sensitivity is improving. The real sign of increased sensitivity is when your usual doses start causing consistent lows, prompting you to reduce your units for the same amount of food.

The total amount of insulin you take each day isn't the focus—it's your insulin-to-carb ratios and correction factors that matter. The higher these are, the more sensitive your body is to insulin.

Before we wrap up...

When you set a goal to improve your insulin sensitivity or work on any other aspect of your health, let it come from a place of self-love. You are not broken, and you don't need fixing. Your worth is not determined by how insulin-sensitive you are or by what your CGM reports say.

Give yourself the space to remember that increasing your insulin sensitivity will make day-to-day management easier, and each day is a step forward in that journey. You are not stuck. Life guarantees change, and you are no exception to the rule. So, get curious about what your outcomes can be, not just what they are today.

We're here to support you every step of the way.

-The Risely Team

What's next?

Our coaches who live with type 1 diabetes collaborate with you to:

- 1) Find the root of what's holding you back.
- 2) Learn your patterns and discover strategies that work.
- 3) Create sustainable behavior change.

[Apply for coaching. Talk to our team.](#)

So you can stop struggling alone and finally experience freedom and confidence with T1D.

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