

Can diabetes be reversed? Researchers are testing ways to do so

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Credit: McMaster University

Can type 2 diabetes be stopped in its tracks, pushed into remission, and perhaps reversed? McMaster University researchers want to find out.

They are leading two national research studies focused on treating [diabetes](#) with an intensive diet, [physical activity](#) and drug regimen for three months. The drugs are then stopped, and participants are followed to see if the diabetes returns.

"We think this could work for up to 40 per cent of people with diabetes and possibly more," said Dr. Hertzell Gerstein, senior investigator of the studies. He is a professor of medicine of McMaster University's Michael G. DeGroot School of Medicine and an endocrinologist of Hamilton Health Sciences.

"Some studies have suggested that up to 10 per cent of people with diabetes go into remission with just diet and activity. Other studies say remission is higher with intensive medication therapy. So we had to test both together," he said.

"The pilot study, completed in 83 people, indicated that this approach is promising," said Dr. Natalia McInnes, principal investigator for the studies. She is an assistant professor of medicine at McMaster University and an endocrinologist of Hamilton Health Sciences.

"Participants are encouraged to do moderate-intensity physical activity for 30 minutes five to six days a week. They also receive individualized advice on how to improve their diet, and take three diabetes medications for three months, after which the medications are stopped," she said.

"Participants also have frequent visits in the clinic to help with lifestyle modifications."

"Study participants are certainly finding this to be a positive experience," McInnes added.

Study participant Mary McCully of Hamilton agrees. After two months she lost 15 pounds and has improved blood sugar readings.

"The comprehensive team approach offered with this trial certainly assisted me in achieving my goals of lowering my blood sugar but also regaining control over my health and my future well-being," said McCully, who was diagnosed with diabetes six years ago.

"After eight weeks my blood sugars are well under control and I'm feeling healthier in general," she added.

Besides the Boris Clinic Diabetes Care and Research Program in Hamilton, the studies are getting underway in Calgary, Winnipeg, Montreal, London, and Toronto. They are expected to take about two years. The studies, led through the Population Health Research Institute of McMaster University and Hamilton Health Sciences, are funded by several pharmaceutical companies.

Patients may be eligible to participate in the studies if they were diagnosed with type 2 diabetes within the past eight years and not currently taking insulin.

People meeting the criteria in the Hamilton area who would like more information about these studies may contact Ada Smith at 905-521-2100 ext. 22166, 75526 or 22205.

Provided by McMaster University

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