Can Okra Help Diabetes?

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As a diabetes educator, I have had many questions regarding “the cure for diabetes.”

Recently, there have been many questions about okra and its supposed curative effect on diabetes.

So far, I had not heard anything from any of the physicians I work with and had not read any peer-reviewed studies but figured if so many of my patients were wondering about it, and it warranted a bit more research.

What Is Okra?

For those of you who have never eaten okra, I never have either!

Okra, also known as abelmoschus esculentus, is a vegetable grown in warm weather climates.

It is often used as a thickener in soups but is also chopped into stews, or fried and boiled. It is a dieters dream vegetable because it is very low in calories – 30 calories per 100 grams with no saturated fat or cholesterol and very rich in nutrients.

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As it turns out, just because I had not read any articles about the use of okra for diabetes management does not mean there weren’t any out there!

According to *Diabetes Self-Management*, numerous reputable studies have been performed and published touting the benefits.

For example, a 2005 study from Taiwan in the Taiwanese journal *Planta Medica* used okra to treat diabetes in rats. The researchers used myricetin, a chemical elicited from okra and administered it to the rats via an IV. The myricetin allowed to the rats’ muscles to greater utilize the glucose ingested, decreasing glucose levels.

Another study from Bangladesh, published in *ISRN Pharmaceuticals*, published their results showing that okra given to rats caused a decreased in post-meal glucose spikes. In this study, okra was given via a feeding tube to the rats.

One other study published in India in the *Journal of Pharmacy & Bioallied Sciences* in 2011 reported a reduction in both blood glucose levels and triglyceride levels. This was achieved by feeding the rats powdered okra seeds and peel extracts for 28 days.

What Is the Flaw in These Studies?

These studies show extremely promising results. If you are familiar with pharmacology, *Diabetes Self-Management* reports that okra seems to act like the drug acarbose (Precose) by slowing glucose into the bloodstream, and also improving lipid levels.

However, the flaw in these studies is that there is no human research. All studies were performed on animals and were also conducted in Asia, meaning that the American healthcare system does not necessarily agree with the results until they are performed in the United States.

What Does the Public Say?

Despite this fact, people worldwide have read the research – and are responding by using okra as a way to treat their diabetes.

Okra is readily available worldwide due to transport and trade, but it is found naturally in Ethiopia, the Eastern Mediterranean, India, the Americas, and the Caribbean. These populations may be most likely to try to use okra to treat their diabetes, even without the help of their physician.

According to *Diabetes.co.uk*, an online community for diabetes that is also a reputable source for diabetes, “Outside of scientific research, many people with diabetes have reported decreasing blood sugar levels after soaking cut-up okra pieces in water overnight and then drinking the juice in the morning, while in Turkey roasted okra seeds have been used as traditional diabetes medicine for generations.”

How to Use Okra for Diabetes

There does not seem to be any right or wrong way to consume okra for the management of diabetes. Consume it as you see fit and as it sits right with your taste buds.

The inside of the okra is reportedly slimy, and some people cannot tolerate the texture; if this is you, eating the okra raw may not be advisable. Using it in a soup, stew or cooking it may be in your best interest.

It is recommended that if you decide to consume the okra raw, select smaller pieces – 3 to 4 inches in length for palatability.

Consume the okra daily for one month and keep track of blood sugars as you go.

The Bottom Line…

There have been reports that okra can interfere with Metformin. It seems to block the Metformin in the intestines while it is blocking glucose.

If you are on Metformin, discuss the everyday use of okra with your physician as okra may be contraindicated for you.

Also, if you are predisposed to calcium oxalate kidney stones, high amounts of okra may increase your chances of further kidney stones.

The research for using okra for diabetes is compelling, but it is still in its infancy.

Depending on your blood glucose levels, your comorbid conditions and your health in general, your physician may agree that it is ok to try okra for blood glucose management, or they may advise against it in favor of other treatments.

Please discuss at length with your physician before making treatment decisions.