Banish belly fat with these insulin-lowering superfoods

Pack on a few pounds this summer? Reach for these foods — packed with powerful nutrients — to help you lose your love handles and get back on track for fall.

Sep 12, 2013 [Natasha Turner, ND](http://www.chatelaine.com/author/natashaturner/) [0](http://www.chatelaine.com/health/wellness/insulin-lowering-nutrients-banish-belly-fat/)



(Photo by Alvaro Goveia)

If your nutrition and exercise plans were taken over by the lazy days of summer then you may be gearing up for the great September slim down. As you know, any diet program starts in the kitchen before it can even progress to the gym. However, there are a few key everyday nutrients that are easy to overlook en route to a smaller waistline. Here are seven that you should incorporate more often to lose your love handles.

1. Make room for magnesium
This power-nutrient plays an important role in how (and how much) insulin is released. A magnesium-rich diet abundant can substantially reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, according to [a report from Harvard University](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/14693979).

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Researchers followed 85,000 women and 42,000 men for 18 and 12 years respectively, during which time 5,400 participants developed type 2 diabetes. Those with the highest levels of dietary magnesium intake reduced their risk of developing type 2 diabetes by up to 34 percent — even when their weight, physical activity and lifestyle habits weren’t anything to brag about.

Bottom line: Reach for [magnesium-rich foods](http://www.healthaliciousness.com/articles/foods-high-in-magnesium.php)like raw spinach, three cups of it boasts 72 mg. Adding half a cup of nuts and seeds can render more than 600 mg of magnesium, a cup of cooked beans or lentils can give you almost 150 mg while a six ounce serving of fish brings 91 mg. I recommend taking200-800 mg of magnesium citrate or glycinate to bowel tolerance daily.

2. Master your metabolism with iodine
Chances are you’ve heard of iodine in connection with the master of your metabolism, your [thyroid](http://www.chatelaine.com/health/wellness/thyroid-cause-of-infertility/). However it also plays a role in helping you lose your love handles, by improving insulin levels.

Research published in the Ukrainian journal *[Lik Sprava](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20608029%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)*suggests iodine insufficiency plays a major role in type 2 diabetes and insulin control. Another study published in the*European Journal of Endocrinology*(2009) found a link between metabolic syndrome and iodine deficiency.

Bottom line: These studies show why it’s a great idea to top your salads with dried seaweed flakes (1/4 ounce has 4.5 mg of iodine), lima beans (1/2 cup gives you 8 mcg) or cottage cheese (1 cup for 65 mcg). A dosage of 150 to 200 mcg per day has also been found to reduce the amount of insulin a diabetic patient may require.

3. Reveal a flatter stomach with zinc
While you may associate this nutrient with [flu season](http://www.chatelaine.com/health/wellness/fight-back-with-dr-turners-five-step-flu-protocol/), it can also protect you against diabetes. When zinc-concentration levels drop, so does your level of insulin sensitivity which leaves more glucose in your bloodstream, causing high blood sugar and eventually fat gain.

A [study](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22277170) of Spanish school children discovered a direct relationship between low zinc levels, increased body fat, and insulin resistance. Children who were zinc deficient had poor insulin sensitivity and increased glucose intolerance.

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Bottom line: You can bump up your zinc levels with the following foods: lamb, grass-fed beef, scallops, oysters, sesame seeds and[pumpkin seeds](http://www.chatelaine.com/recipes/pepitas-pumpkin-seeds/).

4. See yourself skinny with vitamin C
You may be surprised to learn that vitamin C has a similar chemical structure to glucose, which means that spending too much time at the donut counter will reduce your body’s levels of vitamin C — as glucose goes up, vitamin C goes down.

A study published in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research*(2007) looked at 84 patients with type 2 diabetes who randomly received either 500 mg or 1,000 mg of vitamin C daily for six weeks. The researchers discovered that the group supplementing with 1,000 mg of vitamin C experienced a significant decrease in fasting blood sugar, triglycerides, cholesterol (LDL) and insulin levels. For more on [how vitamin C can help slim your waistline click here](http://www.chatelaine.com/health/wellness/detox-reduce-stress-and-lose-belly-fat-with-vitamin-c/).

Bottom line: Know that you don’t have to load up on oranges alone. Raw kale provides 120 mg per 100 gram serving of vitamin C, which is twice the amount that oranges do. Surprisingly, fresh herbs like thyme and red and green hot chili peppers pack a serious-C punch. I also recommending adding 1000-2000 mg in supplemental form daily.

5. Pack in the potassium
Potassium, an important electrolyte, helps maintain the balance between the contents of a cell and the fluid surrounding it, which is why it can help you shed excess water weight. However, it also has a clinically important effect on your waistline because high blood sugar can use up our stores of potassium and magnesium. Essentially, high insulin can lower potassium levels in the blood and leave you feeling like the Pillsbury doughboy.

Bottom line: While everyone thinks of bananas as being high in potassium, they’re also high in sugar, so not always the best choice to boost levels. My favourite way to boost potassium is simply a cup of unsweetened coconut water. Incorporating dark leafy greens and a three-ounce serving of salmon are also great sources.

6. Lose more with calcium
Got milk? Get slimmer. A two-year study completed at [Purdue University](http://www.purdue.edu/uns/html4ever/1999/990420.Teegarden.calcium.html) found that adequate amounts of calcium slowed weight gain, possibly by accelerating the burning of fat for energy. The researchers found that the women who consumed at least 780 mg of calcium either had no increase in body fat or lost body fat over the two-year period. Researchers found that the high-calcium group showed decreased insulin levels and a significant increase in insulin sensitivity.

Bottom line: If you’re lactose intolerant, you can still enjoy high-calcium foods. Try a cup of collard greens, spinach or kale, which are all high in calcium.

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