The Hidden Health Problem Your Doctor Isn't Checking For: Insulin Resistance

By Robert Ferguson

When you go to the doctor for a checkup, you're usually asked for a blood test. Common markers such as blood sugar and cholesterol levels are measured, but there's one crucial test that often gets overlooked — the fasting insulin test. I'm Robert Ferguson, creator of the Diet Free Life methodology and Chief Nutrition Officer of iCoura Health, Inc. After years of helping people improve their metabolic health, I can tell you that the failure to test for insulin resistance is a major oversight in the medical field. By the time most people are diagnosed with high blood pressure or type 2 diabetes, it's already too late to prevent the damage caused by insulin resistance.

The Story of Susan: A Missed Opportunity

Let me share a story to help you understand the urgency of addressing insulin resistance early. Susan, a woman in her early 40s, had struggled with her weight for years. She felt like she was doing everything right — eating healthy foods, exercising regularly, and trying to manage stress. Despite her efforts, she started noticing some troubling signs: weight around her midsection that wouldn't budge, fatigue, and brain fog. But when she went to her doctor, the lab work came back "normal." Her blood sugar was fine, and her blood pressure was slightly elevated, but no one mentioned insulin resistance. She left the doctor's office thinking everything was okay, not knowing that insulin resistance was silently building up in her body.

By the time Susan's blood pressure hit 145/85, and she was diagnosed with pre-diabetes, it was clear that early intervention could have made all the difference. If she had been tested for fasting insulin levels, her insulin resistance could have been addressed before it led to high blood pressure and the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Why Isn't Fasting Insulin Commonly Tested?

In 2010, I sat down with three physicians and posed a simple question: "I know it is common to check a person's fasting glucose and Hemoglobin A1c, but it makes sense to me that we should also be checking their fasting insulin?" Their response was quick and dismissive: "If you are checking fasting glucose, you don't need to check one's fasting insulin. You teach the nutrition, Robert, and we doctors will take care of which health markers are needed."

Well, those doctors were wrong, and my intuition was right. Fast forward to today, and it's clear that testing for fasting insulin and identifying insulin resistance is not only helpful, but in my opinion, it is a medical injustice when it's ignored. By focusing solely on blood sugar and glucose levels, doctors miss the root cause — insulin resistance. This is a serious issue because insulin resistance can silently lead to heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and many other health problems. In my experience, by testing fasting insulin and addressing insulin resistance early, we can prevent these serious health outcomes and even reverse conditions like high blood pressure and obesity.

The Three Main Causes of Insulin Resistance

There are three primary contributors to insulin resistance: inflammation, stress, and hyperinsulinemia. Chronic inflammation, often caused by poor nutrition habits or lack of exercise, can impair the body's ability to respond to insulin. Stress, whether emotional or physical, can lead to the production of hormones that make the body more resistant to insulin. Hyperinsulinemia, which is the frequent and excessive production of insulin over time due to frequent eating, overeating or poor food choices, further compounds the problem.

Does Genetics Play a Role in Insulin Resistance?

Genetics can play a role in insulin resistance, but it is not the sole factor. While certain genetic variations may predispose individuals to develop insulin resistance, lifestyle factors such as nutrition habits, physical activity, and stress levels have a much greater influence. For example, a family history of type 2 diabetes can increase the likelihood of developing insulin resistance, as inherited traits may affect how the body responds to insulin. However, even those with a genetic predisposition can prevent or reverse insulin resistance through lifestyle changes like improving their nutrition habits, exercising regularly, managing stress, and getting adequate sleep. This highlights the importance of taking proactive steps to address insulin resistance, regardless of genetic risk factors.

Recognizing the Early Signs of Insulin Resistance

While insulin resistance can be silent, there are certain signs that you can look for to spot it early:

- Excess Body Fat (i.e., overweight, obesity)
- Waist Circumference: Women >35" and Men >40"
- Fasting Blood Sugar: At least 100 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL), or the use of drugs to lower blood sugar
- Blood Pressure: At least 130 systolic or 85 diastolic, or on drugs to lower blood pressure
- Triglycerides: At least 150 mg/dL
- HDL (healthy) Cholesterol: Below 50 mg/dL
- Skin Tags and Dark Patches on Skin

If you notice any of these signs, it's important to act. They could be early indicators that your body is developing insulin resistance, which, if left unchecked, can lead to more serious conditions like high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, obesity, migraines, heart disease, fatty liver, and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

How to Reverse Insulin Resistance

Reversing insulin resistance is possible, and it starts with testing your fasting insulin levels. Once you know your insulin levels, you can make targeted changes to improve your insulin sensitivity. The most important strategies include:

- 1. Adopting a Balanced, Anti-Inflammatory Diet: This includes reducing refined carbohydrates, sugars, and processed foods, and increasing your intake of whole foods, healthy fats, lean proteins, and fiber-rich vegetables.
- 2. **Regular Exercise**: Physical activity helps your muscles use insulin more efficiently, which can help lower insulin levels.
- 3. **Stress Management**: Reducing stress through practices like meditation, yoga, or deep breathing exercises can help reduce the production of stress hormones, which can make insulin resistance worse.
- 4. **Getting Adequate Sleep**: Sleep deprivation can increase insulin resistance, so getting 7-9 hours of sleep per night is essential.
- 5. **Omega-3 Fatty Acids and Polyphenols**: Suboptimal levels of omega-3 fatty acids are a contributor to insulin resistance, while consuming an adequate intake of omega-3s and polyphenols has been shown to improve insulin sensitivity.

How to Test for Insulin Resistance

Testing for insulin resistance involves measuring your fasting insulin levels, along with other key markers like fasting blood sugar, triglycerides, and HDL cholesterol. Unfortunately, many physicians don't routinely test for fasting insulin, even though it's one of the most accurate ways to identify insulin resistance. If we find that you have insulin resistance, that's a win—it means we can begin the process of reversing it before it leads to more serious health conditions. If you're concerned about your health or suspect that you might have insulin resistance, I encourage you to schedule a free consultation with me, Robert Ferguson. During this consultation, we can discuss how to get the proper testing and develop a plan to help you manage or even reverse insulin resistance. Don't wait for a diagnosis—act now and start learning how to take control of your health.

The Bottom Line

Insulin resistance is a silent threat that often goes unnoticed until it's too late. By taking proactive steps to monitor and improve your metabolic health, you can prevent serious complications and live a healthier life.

If you're ready to learn your level of insulin resistance and discover personalized strategies to reverse it, schedule a free consultation with me, Robert Ferguson, today. Together, we'll address the root cause and set you on the path to optimal health.

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