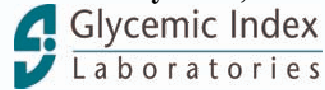


There may not be a magic bullet, but we still have common sense



Atarah Grysman, M.Sc.



While numerous clinical studies have consistently proven the glycemic index (GI) to be an effective tool in controlling blood glucose and insulin levels, weight loss, and the risks of certain diseases, it sometimes comes under criticism for not being the ‘magic bullet’ people sometimes expect in weight management.

The glycemic index is a powerful tool when used in the right way – that is, in combination with healthy eating, regular exercise, and medications as needed. The glycemic index is not intended to be used in isolation, with a disregard to common sense in healthy eating. When used properly, the GI can greatly benefit overall health, minimizing diabetes risk and complications and promoting weight loss.

The concept of the GI is an improvement over regular carbohydrate counting because it involves a more detailed understanding of how carbohydrates are digested in the human body, recognizing differences between different carbohydrate-containing foods, and how this will affect our physiological responses after consumption.

This leads to what some view as criticisms of the GI – that there is a broad range of GI values for different types of potatoes, for example, or that the GI of bananas will change depending on their stage of ripeness. However, one must appreciate the physiological bases for these variances in GI values; that the variety or stage of ripeness of the food causes changes in its physical or chemical composition, affecting its rate of digestion and therefore, the GI. These variances do not detract from the validity of the GI; they can be expected from a concept based on a complex, fluid science, where things do not always fall neatly into rigid categories.

Perhaps this renders the GI less suitable for those interested in a few hard and fast rules. However, many people in today’s societies are ready and willing to be active participants in their own health care, wanting to learn more about their conditions and how to manage them, even if this entails more than a few simple rules, and requires a deeper understanding of how their body works. Those who put the effort into understanding their physical condition and how they can help themselves will surely reap the long-term rewards and health benefits relating to the GI and beyond.