

EXPERT INTERVIEW

SERVAR TOLAY

Expert Interview with Servar Tolay: Nutrition, Physical Activity and Motivation in Diabetes

Servar Tolay

Servar Tolay is a qualified dietitian with a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) in Dietetics, a DDG-certified diabetes educator and a B-licence fitness trainer.

He combines expertise in nutritional science with practical exercise knowledge to help people with diabetes or other metabolic conditions make lasting changes in their daily lives. As a dedicated adviser, he focuses on practical, achievable solutions tailored to each person's lifestyle, motivation and health challenges.

Diba Nazar-Czaplinski: What common challenges do you encounter when advising people with diabetes on nutrition and lifestyle?

The biggest challenge is that eating and lifestyle habits have developed over decades and cannot be changed overnight. For someone who has not exercised for 40 years, getting started is a major hurdle, both physically and mentally. That is why my approach focuses on small, realistic steps rather than restrictions.

Diba Nazar-Czaplinski: In your view, how important is combining a balanced diet with regular physical activity in type 2 diabetes?

For me, nutrition and physical activity are the two most important pillars of type 2 diabetes management. One without the other usually does not work. Everyday activity is particularly important: even regular walks or taking the stairs improve insulin sensitivity, increase energy expenditure through activity and make blood glucose levels easier to manage.

Diba Nazar-Czaplinski: You have both extensive nutritional expertise and experience as a fitness trainer. How can people benefit from this combination in their daily lives?

Because I bring both areas of expertise to my work, I can do more than tell patients what to eat: I can also show them exactly how to be active. For example, I demonstrate simple exercises they can do at home using their own body weight or resistance bands. These are suitable for beginners, but still challenging enough for patients to feel that they are making an effort. This allows me to combine nutrition and exercise in a comprehensive approach, rather than addressing just one aspect.

Diba Nazar-Czaplinski: What simple steps can help people become more active in everyday life, even when they have little time or motivation?

I focus on small steps that are easy to fit into everyday life. For people who work, this might mean parking a little further away, taking the stairs instead of the lift or using their lunch break for a walk. Regular short shopping trips on foot or by bicycle also naturally add more movement. The key is for activity to fit into daily life rather than feel like another appointment.

Diba Nazar-Czaplinski: Many people underestimate the importance of muscle mass. Why is building muscle particularly important for people with diabetes?

Muscles are the body's largest store of sugar and the main site of glucose uptake. The more muscle mass a person has, the better their blood glucose can be regulated. Strength training improves insulin sensitivity, increases basal metabolic rate and helps counteract muscle loss. Even simple exercises at home using body weight or resistance bands can be enough.

Diba Nazar-Czaplinski: You had the opportunity to try the myostyle EMS system. What was your personal experience, for example in terms of how the training felt, its intensity and how well it fits into everyday life?

I really liked the myostyle EMS system. The app allows you to tailor the training very individually, and the exercises are suitable for beginners too. It feels intense: you are really worn out after a session, and everyone can choose their own intensity. It fits into everyday life because you can use it at home, and all the accessories fit into a small backpack. Just 20 minutes is enough to train the whole body.

Diba Nazar-Czaplinski: Who do you think could benefit from a system like this, for example people facing barriers to exercise, people with excess weight or older adults?

I see the system as particularly useful for people facing barriers to exercise, people with excess weight and older adults. For those with joint problems or limited mobility, it is often the only way to become active at all. For people with excess weight, it lowers the barrier to getting started because training can take place at home and be adapted individually. In older age, it helps preserve muscle and counteract muscle loss. It does not replace professional advice, but it is a useful tool for people who might otherwise not become active at all.

Diba Nazar-Czaplinski: What role does personal responsibility play in your daily work, and how can people be motivated to take an active role in their own health?

For me, personal responsibility means that I provide the knowledge and tools, but putting them into practice is up to the patient. That is why I work with small, realistic goals and first listen to what is feasible in their daily lives. Motivation comes from a sense of achievement and feeling in control, rather than from pressure. When patients notice that their changes are having an effect, taking responsibility follows almost naturally.

Diba Nazar-Czaplinski: How can nutrition advice for diabetes be modern and practical without compromising enjoyment or quality of life?

A modern approach to nutrition in diabetes needs to fit the patient's daily life. That is why I avoid outright bans and build on what the patient already eats. Adopting an entirely new plan overnight does not work: very few people can sustain it. It is better to make gradual adjustments without turning everything upside down. Enjoyment must remain part of the picture, because when eating continues to be a pleasure, patients are more likely to stay on track.

Diba Nazar-Czaplinski: What would you advise someone at increased risk of diabetes who wants to take the first step towards change today?

My most important advice would be to become more active and build more movement into everyday life. This does not have to mean sport: regular walks or taking the stairs instead of the lift already help. Alongside this, make small dietary adjustments, such as replacing sugary drinks, eating more vegetables and including plenty of protein from lean sources. The first step is the hardest, but those who keep going soon realise that it is worthwhile.

Dear Servar, thank you for the conversation and the valuable insights into your work with clients.

This interview is for general information only and does not replace individual medical advice.