TYPE II DIABETES

Your Guide for Taking Control

RESEARCHERS LABEL IT AN EPIDEMIC

More adults than ever before, and even children, are developing type II diabetes, leading researchers to label it an epidemic.

There is no cure for diabetes. However, if you have diabetes, controlling your blood sugar levels and making healthy lifestyle changes can help you lower your risk of diabetes-related health problems.

What Is Diabetes?

The body breaks down food into glucose (blood sugar) for fuel. For glucose to get from the bloodstream into the cells for growth and energy, insulin is produced by the pancreas, a gland behind the stomach.

In people with diabetes, the pancreas does not produce enough insulin, or the cells do not respond to the insulin that is produced, and glucose builds up in the blood. The body loses its main source of fuel even though the blood contains large amounts of glucose.

There are three forms of diabetes: type I, type II and gestational. The most common of these is type II.

The Benefits of Controlling Diabetes

- You'll have more energy to do the things you love to do.
- You'll prevent symptoms such as exhaustion, thirst and frequent urination.
- You'll avoid complications such as eye, foot or kidney damage.
- You'll lower your risk of premature heart attack and heart disease.
- You'll control your weight, so you will look and feel better.

Common Complications

Diabetic eye disease. People with diabetes are at risk for diabetic retinopathy (blindness), cataracts (clouding of the lenses) and glaucoma (vision loss due to increased pressure within the eye). Action plan: Get an eye examination at least once a year. Eye exams can detect diabetic eye conditions before symptoms appear. If caught early, most can be successfully treated, saving your eyesight.

Nerve damage (neuropathy). Nerve damage numbs parts of the body, especially the feet and legs, and can also affect internal organs. Nerve damage to the feet can keep you from feeling sores and blisters, and increase your chance of infection. Action plan: Check your feet and legs for small cuts and blisters often (or have someone do it for you). Wash and dry your feet and change socks daily. Trim your toenails regularly to avoid ingrown nails.

Narrowed blood vessels. Diabetes can narrow blood vessels, causing damage to the heart, kidneys, limbs and eyes. Action plan: Visit your doctor for screenings to check blood vessel and organ function.

Know Your Number

You can check your blood sugar using a device called a **glucose meter**, usually by pricking your finger to draw a drop of blood. Ask your health care provider how often you should check your blood sugar levels and what range you should strive for.

Also ask about the **hemoglobin A1c test.** This test provides a picture of blood glucose levels over several months, showing how well you are controlling your diabetes overall.

Note: Don't avoid testing because you've lapsed on some of your healthy lifestyle choices. Learning to deal with blood sugar ups and downs is part of controlling diabetes successfully.

Pre-diabetes an Early Warning

Pre-diabetes is having higher-than-normal glucose (blood sugar) levels that are not high enough to be considered diabetes. Pre-diabetes increases risk for diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Talk with your doctor about having a blood glucose test. It could give you the chance to make changes now to prevent serious health problems later in life.

Fit in Some Fitness

For people with type II diabetes, exercise helps control weight, regulate blood sugar and keep the heart and lungs healthy. No matter what your fitness level, any amount of physical activity will help you manage your condition.

Exercise tips

- **Talk** with your doctor and get a checkup before you start an exercise program.
- **Work** at your level. If you have not exercised for a long time, start slowly and work up to 30 to 45 minutes at least three times per week.
- **Try** walking, swimming, dancing or riding a bicycle. You can also exercise by bowling, cleaning house, mowing the lawn or gardening.

Exercise smart: If you haven't eaten for more than an hour, or your blood sugar is less than 100 to 120, have a snack (an apple, baby carrots, half a bagel or a glass of milk) before you start exercising.

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