

Life with Diabetes

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a chronic health condition affecting how the body turns food into energy. The body breaks down most of the food eaten into sugar (glucose), which is released into the bloodstream. When blood sugar goes up, it signals the pancreas to release insulin. Insulin is the key allowing blood sugar into the body's cells for use as energy.

With diabetes, the body does not make sufficient insulin or put to proper use the produced insulin. Lack of insulin or body cells' lack of response to insulin, excess sugar remains in the bloodstream.

Types of Diabetes

1. Type 1 Diabetes

Assumed to be a result of an autoimmune reaction, whereby the body attacks itself erroneously. The reaction stops the body from making insulin. It is estimated 5-10% of diabetic patients suffer from type 1 diabetes. The symptoms develop quickly. It is mainly diagnosed in children, teenagers, and young adults. Researchers have not been successful in establishing how to prevent type 1 diabetes.

2. Type 2 Diabetes

This occurs when the body does not properly utilise the produced insulin and unable to maintain normal blood sugar levels. Approximately 90-95% of diabetics have type 2. This develops over a number of years and is mostly diagnosed in adults. Though recent trends show an upsurge of diagnosis numbers in children, teenagers, and young adults.

3. Gestational Diabetes

This develops in expectant women who have not been diagnosed with diabetes before.

Gestational diabetes poses higher health problem risks for the unborn baby, such as obesity or development of type 2 diabetes. Though it goes away after delivery, however, it increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes later in life.

Living with Diabetes

Held a one on one interview with Mrs. Jones, who was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes at the age of 35 years. She has lived with this health condition for 25 years. Her experience has not been a ride in the park. When she was first diagnosed, she tested her blood sugar every so often. Doing so helped her understand how food, activity, stress, and illness could affect her blood sugar levels. Over the years, she got it figured out for the most part. But then—bam! At times, something makes her blood sugar zoom up. She will try to adjust it with food, activity, or insulin injections, and it dips on the low. She finds herself on a roller coaster no one with diabetes wants to ride.

Diabetes Risk Factors

Over time diabetes takes a toll on patients and causes serious health problems, such as heart disease, stroke, loss of vision and kidney complications.

Advised Mrs. Jones to look out for the below triggers that can send her blood sugar soaring:

- ❖ Sunburn - the pain causes stress, which may increase blood sugar levels.
- ❖ Artificial sweeteners - though research is ongoing, some case studies indicate they raise blood sugar.
- ❖ Coffee - some people's blood sugar is extra-sensitive to caffeine, even without adding sweeteners.

- ❖ Sleep pattern - a night of too little sleep can cause improper insulin use in the body.
- ❖ Skipping breakfast - this is a very important meal of the day that should not be skipped. Missing breakfast, means the body needs to produce more insulin to keep the body energized.
- ❖ Time of day - blood sugar can be harder to control later in the day as opposed to earlier in the day..
- ❖ Dawn phenomenon - there is usually a surge in hormones early in the morning whether one has diabetes or not. Diabetic patients tend to have a spike in blood sugar.
- ❖ Dehydration - less water in the body means more blood sugar concentration.
- ❖ Nose spray - some have chemicals that trigger the liver to make more blood sugar.
- ❖ Gum disease - it is both a complication of diabetes and a blood sugar spiker.
- ❖ Extreme heat - causes blood vessels to dilate, resulting into quick absorption of insulin, that can lead to low blood sugar.
- ❖ New activity or food - could trigger a spike or dip in blood sugar levels. Check the blood sugar levels before and after to gauge the safety.

Recommendations

Despite numerous research studies that have been carried out, no permanent cure for diabetes has been found. Managing blood sugar levels is the key to living well with diabetes. This can be done by:

- a. **Diet** - eating healthy foods in the right amount and right time. In the beginning, you may need to try different food varieties to figure out what works best. You can cut back on sugar, eat more proteins to stay fuller longer. You could focus on filling up with extra fruits and vegetables, which leaves less room for unhealthy food, or limit variety for most meals and

stick with choices you know are healthy and filling. The details will depend on what you like and what fits in best with your life. Consult with a dietitian to assist in creating an eating plan.

b. Healthy Weight - You may not weigh the same as 20 years ago, but can still get to a weight that enhances your health and life. The two ways to gauge if your weight is healthy is by:

i. Body Mass Index (BMI) - measures height against weight. The normal BMI being between 18.5 and 24.9.

ii. Waist Circumference - this measures the belly fat. For women, a waist size exceeding 35 inches and 40 inches for men, puts you at a very risk. Losing weight can reduce the belly fat and lower the risk. Taking off just 5% to 10%, can improve your health and well-being. Your blood sugar levels are easier to manage and that you require less medication. You will also notice you have more energy and can sleep better too.

c. Exercise - have a routine of working out and being active to burn up the extra glucose in the body. This should be regular in terms of the time and duration. This is critical in aiding body weight loss and blood sugar levels reduction.

d. Doctor's appointments - never miss any scheduled medical check up with your doctor. This is where you are able to identify if all the above measures are helpful and discuss every pertinent issue that may arise.

e. Medication - adhere to the prescribed dosages of medication and at the right time. Regularly check your blood sugar levels

Conclusion

Diabetes is complicated, and it takes practice to manage it in your everyday life. You may be wondering about eating balanced meals, engaging in safe physical activity, checking blood sugar, or giving yourself injectable medicines. Diabetes self-management education and support

(DSMES) services helps you with all these practical skills, whatever stage you are in or what type of diabetes you have. You are not in it alone!

