Managing diabetes; insights and recommendations

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 Abstract

Diabetes is a chronic disease that requires continuous medical care and patient self-management to prevent complications and maintain quality of life. This article summarizes an interview with John, a 45-year-old man struggling to control his type 2 diabetes through diet, exercise, and other self-care behaviors. John faces challenges with meal planning, portion control, sedentary lifestyle, taking medications consistently, and utilizing his healthcare team. He also lacks strong social support. Recommendations focused on adopting structured nutrition habits, increasing physical activity, prioritizing disease management, and establishing a supportive community. Specific advice included meal planning with a nutritionist, exercising regularly through incremental goal-setting, logging blood sugar readings, attending appointments, joining peer support groups, and educating family and friends about his needs. Implementing such lifestyle modifications requires patience and celebrating small successes. With time, John can achieve improved diabetes control through self-care behaviors like a balanced diet, active lifestyle, medication adherence, healthcare engagement, and social encouragement. This article provides a narrative case study of real-world barriers patients encounter in diabetes self-management along with evidence-based solutions.

Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects millions of people worldwide, with a significant impact on their quality of life. It is characterized by high levels of blood glucose (sugar). People with diabetes either do not produce enough insulin or their body does not effectively use the insulin produced. As a result, glucose builds up in the bloodstream and over time, this can lead to serious complications such as heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, nerve damage, and vision loss. According to various sources, the global prevalence of diabetes has been increasing due to lifestyle changes, including dietary habits and lack of physical activity (Diabetes.org, 2021; IDF Diabetes Atlas, 2019).

I recently had the opportunity to interview John, a 45-year-old man who has been living with type 2 diabetes for the past 7 years. John was diagnosed with diabetes at age 38 during a routine physical exam when his doctor noticed his fasting blood glucose was elevated. Since his diagnosis, John has worked to make lifestyle changes to better manage his diabetes, but he still struggles with keeping his blood sugar under control through diet and exercise alone. During our conversation, John opened about his challenges with managing his diabetes, his current self-care routine, and the obstacles he faces in adopting healthier lifestyle habits.

During my interview with the diabetic individual, one major challenge John faces is planning, shopping for, and preparing appropriate meals for managing his diabetes. He is the primary shopper and cook in his family and finds it difficult to find the time to plan out diabetes-friendly meals each week. When he does cook at home, John tends to prepare simple meals, like spaghetti or casseroles, which often have large portions of carbohydrates and are not well-balanced nutritionally.

John also struggles with portion control. He has a big appetite and often doubles portion sizes without realizing it. Eating out is another dietary challenge for John. He travels frequently for work and will eat fast food when on the road. At home, his family orders takeout several nights a week, which tends to be higher in sodium, fat, and calories.

Another area John struggles with is getting regular exercise. He has a sedentary job and spends most evenings and weekends being inactive watching TV or online. John knows exercise is important for managing his blood sugar, but he has difficulty motivating himself to be more active. He feels too tired after work and makes excuses to avoid the gym on weekends.

John also feels intimidated by the exercise equipment and routines at his local gym. He expressed interest in doing more cardio and strength training for his diabetes but feels lost when he tries to use the treadmills, bikes, or weight machines at the gym. This discomfort causes John to avoid physical activity altogether.

In terms of his self-care routine, John checks his blood sugar periodically using a glucose monitor, but not as often as his doctor recommends. He also does not keep detailed logs of his results, which makes it difficult for him to identify patterns and triggers. John was prescribed medication when first diagnosed but has struggled to take it consistently.

He also admits to not prioritizing follow-up appointments with his doctor and diabetes educator. John feels overwhelmed by the healthcare visits, lab tests, and strict recommendations around his diet and lifestyle. He also lacks a good social support system for managing his diabetes. John’s family is not engaged in helping him with meal planning, grocery shopping, or eating healthy together. He feels reluctant to ask for help from friends and family as well.

I would give John the following advice to help him better manage his diabetes after we spoke, and I learned about his struggles and goals:

Nutrition: Create a weekly food plan that takes your schedule, dietary requirements, and tastes into account by working with a qualified dietitian or nutritionist. Meals should be well-balanced, containing complex carbohydrates, lean proteins, and healthy fats. Build plates based on your knowledge of carbohydrate portion sizes. To fill you up, include non-starchy vegetables. Prepare meals at the weekends so you can have a healthy lunch ready for work. Choose salads and grilled foods when dining out. Ask for sauces and dressings on the side. Portion the dinner to take home or share. Avoid buffets and unlimited portion options. Plan meals and spend evenings cooking with the family. Make it a joint task and responsibility to shop together and try new healthy recipes.

Physical Activity: Make a start by moving more throughout your day. Take walks during your work breaks. Choose the stairs over the lift. Park further away and take a longer walk. Avoid prolonged sitting by moving your feet or fidgeting. As tolerated, gradually increase your daily exercise level to 30 to 60 minutes. Moving is a terrific place to start. Exercises in the water, like swimming, are beneficial for joints. On bad days, try chair cardio videos. Plan your workouts like you would an appointment. For accountability and encouragement, locate a walking partner or enroll in a class. Workouts should be varied to avoid boredom. Enumerate your fitness accomplishments and objectives. See a personal trainer who is knowledgeable about the objectives and constraints of diabetes. Create a regimen and learn how to operate the equipment in the gym securely. Think about using trackable fitness wearables.

Self-care: Measure your blood sugar in the morning and at night, at least twice a day. Maintain thorough records of your activities, meals, prescriptions, and results. Review regularly to identify trends. Inform your healthcare providers about the results. As instructed, take your medication and show up for visits. Seek assistance in interpreting test results, prescription guidelines, and lifestyle initiatives. Have a look at joining a support group. Include prompts and reminders to take your medicine, exercise, and eat healthfully to help you manage your diabetes daily. Rather than treating your health as an afterthought, prioritize it.

Social Support: Inform your loved ones about the necessity for you to manage your diabetes. Describe how they can assist with meal preparation, grocery shopping, and emotional support. Assign responsibilities to your family members. Find other diabetics who can offer guidance and inspiration. Participate in online forums to exchange advice and experiences. Honor your tiny everyday accomplishments in controlling your diet and exercise. Have a consultation with a counsellor or therapist who specializes in managing chronic illnesses. Talk about your needs for emotional and mental well-being in relation to having diabetes.

The significance of maintaining a well-balanced diet forms the foundation for effectively managing diabetes. Understanding the impact of diet on blood sugar levels and overall health is imperative. Research findings and statistics underscore the direct relationship between diet and diabetes management, highlighting the role of nutrition in promoting health. To better manage diabetes, individuals should strive to consume a variety of nutrient-dense foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats. Emphasizing the significance of portion control and meal timing is vital for regulating blood sugar levels.

Additionally, there is a need to limit the intake of refined sugars, saturated fats, and processed foods to enhance diabetes management. Furthermore, promoting lifestyle changes is key in adopting a sustainable approach to dietary modifications, which can include regular physical activity and stress management. It is crucial to highlight the role of a registered dietitian or certified diabetes educator in creating personalized meal plans and providing ongoing support. These dietary recommendations serve as a steppingstone to developing sustainable habits that support long-term health, ultimately enhancing overall well-being and diabetes control. (Khan &Aslani,2021).

It is recommended that the individual engage in regular physical activity, such as brisk walking, swimming, cycling, or any other form of aerobic exercise that they enjoy and can maintain on a consistent basis. Additionally, an individual is advised to consult with their healthcare team to develop a personalized exercise plan that takes into consideration their current fitness level, any existing medical. Exercise plays a pivotal role in diabetes care, as it offers various benefits for individuals with diabetes. Research supports the idea that exercise improves insulin sensitivity, aids in weight management, and enhances overall cardiovascular health (Ahmed, 2022).

Incorporating regular physical activity, including aerobic exercises, resistance training, and flexibility exercises, can help individuals with diabetes effectively manage their blood sugar levels and reduce the risk of complications (Oktara&Butar,2022). While some may argue that exercise is challenging for those with diabetes due to potential risks of hypoglycemia or other health complications, with proper guidance and precautions, individuals with diabetes can engage in safe and effective exercise routines (Oktara&Butar,2022).

Living with diabetes can often lead to emotional distress, anxiety, and depression, as managing the condition requires significant lifestyle changes and constant vigilance. Research has found that individuals with diabetes are more likely to experience psychological distress. It is important to address the emotional well-being of individuals with diabetes by offering support groups, counseling services, and stress management techniques. A study by American Diabetes Association highlights the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy in improving the emotional well-being of individuals with diabetes. While some may argue that emotional well-being is not a critical component of diabetes management, it is essential to counter this by emphasizing the strong correlation between emotional health and physical health in diabetic individuals.

The cornerstone of effective diabetes care and control is educating individuals on the importance of blood sugar monitoring. Regular monitoring of blood glucose levels is essential for individuals with diabetes to ensure that their levels are within a healthy range. This can be achieved through the use of blood glucose meters, continuous glucose monitors, or flash glucose monitoring systems. For instance, a study published in the Journal of Diabetes Science and Technology emphasized the importance of consistent blood sugar monitoring to support diabetes self-management and improve glycemic control.

Engaging with family, friends, and support groups can provide emotional and practical assistance in adhering to dietary and exercise plans. Research by American Diabetes Association found that having a strong support network can significantly improve diabetes management outcomes, leading to better blood glucose control and overall well-being. Additionally, seeking professional counseling or therapy for emotional support is essential in coping with the psychological impact of diabetes.

To sum up, good diabetes management is essential to the general health of those who have the disease. Important topics including food habits, exercise routines, and possible risk factors were investigated during the interview procedure. It is evident that putting improved diabetes management advice into practice—such as eating a healthier diet and getting regular exercise—can be extremely helpful in controlling the disease and lowering its risks. People can take proactive measures to improve their quality of life and lessen the negative effects of diabetes on their health by stressing the significance of these techniques. This all-encompassing strategy is crucial for controlling the complications related to diabetes and fostering long-term wellbeing.

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