

## **Type 2 Diabetes: Living with the Disease**

This topic is for adults who have had type 2 diabetes for more than a few months.

### **What is diabetes?**

Type 2 diabetes is a lifelong disease that develops when the pancreas cannot produce enough insulin or when the body's tissues become resistant to insulin. Insulin is a hormone that helps the body's cells use sugar (glucose) for energy. It also helps the body store extra sugar in muscle, fat, and liver cells.

### **How can you manage diabetes?**

Taking care of your diabetes takes time and energy every day. The goal is to keep your blood sugar in a target range. It's the best way to reduce your chance of having more problems from diabetes. These problems are called complications.

Just focus on one day at a time, and:

- Make healthy food choices. Eat a balanced diet, and try to manage the amount of carbohydrate you eat by spreading it out over the day. If you're overweight, losing 10 to 20 pounds can improve your blood sugar levels. There are many ways to manage how much and when you eat. Your doctor, a diabetes educator, or a dietitian can help you find a plan that works for you.
- Be active. Try to do moderate activity at least 2½ hours a week. It's fine to be active in blocks of 10 minutes or more throughout your day and week. Activity helps control your blood sugar by using glucose for energy during and after activity. It also helps you stay at a healthy weight, lower high cholesterol, and lower high blood pressure.
- Test your blood sugar levels. Everything in your life can affect your blood sugar levels, from what you eat, to how you feel, to how much activity you get. You may not like having to check your blood sugar regularly and keep track of the results. But testing can really help you keep your diabetes under control.
- Keep high blood pressure and high cholesterol under control. Doing so can lower your risk of heart and large blood vessel disease.
- Take medicines, such as metformin (Glucophage) or insulin, if you need them. These can help you keep your blood sugar levels on target.

And if you smoke, quit. Quitting smoking can help you reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

### **How can you deal with high or low blood sugar?**

Even when you are careful and do all the right things, you can have problems with high or low blood sugar. It is important to know what signs to look for and what to do if this happens.

High blood sugar (hyperglycemia) usually happens over a few days or weeks. Early symptoms include:

- Feeling very thirsty.
- Urinating more often than usual.
- Feeling very hungry.
- Having blurred vision.

People with diabetes can get high blood sugar for many reasons, including not taking their diabetes medicines, eating more than usual (especially sweets), not exercising, or being sick or under a lot of stress.

If you have high blood sugar, follow your treatment plan for lowering it. This may mean taking missed doses of insulin or medicine. Make sure to drink plenty of fluids so that you stay hydrated. Call your doctor if you don't know what to do. Treating high blood sugar is important. If it is left untreated, it can lead to hyperosmolar state, a dangerous condition.

You can get low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) if you take insulin or sulfonylurea pills for diabetes. Low blood sugar can happen suddenly. Early symptoms include:

- Sweating.
- Feeling weak.
- Feeling shaky.
- Feeling very hungry.

Symptoms of low blood sugar may vary over time. You may also have these symptoms if you have a sudden large drop in blood sugar, even though the level does not drop below your target range. Eat 1 tablespoon of sugar, ½ cup of orange juice, or another carbohydrate. Wait 15 minutes, and then check your blood sugar.

### **What are the complications of diabetes and their symptoms?**

Over time, high blood sugar can cause complications such as problems with your eyes, heart, blood vessels, nerves, and kidneys. High blood sugar also makes you more likely to get serious illnesses or infections. Complications can lead to blindness, kidney failure, removal of a limb (amputation), heart attack, stroke, and death. This is why it is so important to keep your blood sugar in your target range.

If you had the disease several years before you were diagnosed, you may already have a complication from diabetes. Even if you don't have problems now, the longer you have diabetes, the more likely you are to get one or more complications. And the better you manage your blood sugar levels, the lower your risk of complications.

Be sure to tell your doctor if you notice any new symptoms, such as vision problems, chest pain, numbness, or a shooting pain in your hands or feet.

### **How can you prevent complications?**

You may be able to prevent, or at least delay, problems from diabetes by keeping your blood sugar level as close to your target range as you can. Treatment of high blood pressure or high cholesterol can also help. If you smoke, quit. Smoking increases your risk for complications.

People with diabetes are 2 to 4 times more likely than people who don't have diabetes to die from heart and blood vessel diseases.<sup>1</sup> Talk to your doctor about whether you should take low-dose aspirin. Daily low-dose aspirin (81 milligrams) may help prevent heart problems if you are at risk for heart attack or stroke.

See your doctor every 3 to 6 months. During these visits, your doctor will review your treatment and do tests and exams, such as an A1c test. These tests can show if your blood sugar is staying within your target range and if you have any complications.

It's also important to have regular checkups with your eye doctor and dentist. Diabetes can cause vision and dental problems.

### **How can you cope with diabetes?**

Trying to manage your diabetes isn't easy. Some days you may feel like it's just too much work to do everything you need to do.

If you're having trouble coping with your feelings, try talking with a counselor. A professional may make it easier to say things you wouldn't talk about with friends or family.

It might also help to:

- Talk to your doctor. He or she can help you deal with your feelings.
- Talk with friends and family about how you feel and any help you need.
- Join a support group. You can find one through your doctor, your local hospital, or the American Diabetes Association.