[IMAGE]

Sweet Success

Prevention Is the Key to Avoiding Diabetes

By Tina Beychok

Diabetes currently affects almost 21 million Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC). Even more alarming is that the age of onset has dropped dramatically. It used to be that diabetes was primarily a "senior" disease, affecting those over age 45. Sadly, this is not the case anymore.

There are two main types of diabetes: type I, which usually is diagnosed in childhood and requires insulin; and type II, which does not require insulin treatment but may require medication. Most cases (about 95 percent) are type II, which can be prevented in the overwhelming majority of cases with proper diet and exercise. What is particularly frightening is the rise in type II diabetes among children.

So, What Exactly Is This Potentially Deadly Disease?

In type II diabetes, the body does not properly process insulin. Normally, the body will break down food into a simple sugar known as glucose. This glucose circulates in the blood until insulin, a hormone created in the pancreas, moves it into waiting cells, where it’s converted into fuel.

A racially diverse group of people. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Normally, the pancreas can adjust the amount of insulin it produces based on glucose levels (blood-glucose or blood-sugar levels). In type II diabetes, while the body can produce insulin, the cells do not respond to it. As a result, the glucose can’t move out of the blood and levels become too high.

What Other Health Problems Come With Diabetes?

The effects of diabetes can be felt, literally, from head to toe, according to the CDC.

- People with diabetes are two to four times more likely to have a stroke than those without the disease.
- Poorly controlled blood sugar may lead to glaucoma and blindness.
- Gum disease and high blood sugar are related.
- Diabetes, particularly in conjunction with high cholesterol or high blood pressure, may lead to heart

disease.

- Kidney damage may result from diabetes, especially in combination with high blood pressure.
- Diabetes has been linked to male sexual dysfunction (impotence).
- Nerves in the feet may become damaged, sometimes leading to amputation.

What Can Be Done to Prevent Diabetes?

If the drug companies are to be believed, there are medications on the market to help you control your blood sugar. However, if the recent FDA alert about an increased risk of heart attack with one particular medication, Avandia, is any indication, drugs might not be the answer.

Fortunately, there are much easier and less dangerous ways to not only control diabetes if you have it, but actually prevent getting it in the first place. Both the CDC and the National Institutes of Health agree that there are two basic elements to this:

- Exercise at least 30 minutes a day, five days a week.
- Eat foods low in fat and reduce total caloric intake.

Small Goals Can Lead to Big Rewards

There are a number of things you can do to prevent diabetes. Individually, they may not seem like very much, but they can add up to a healthier lifestyle. If you try to make sudden, drastic changes, you won't stick with the plan for very long - just look at the lack of success with quick-loss, crash-diet programs as a perfect example.

First, set realistic goals. Tell yourself that you will work toward losing 7 percent of your body weight, for example. That may not seem like much, but if you do the math for someone who weighs 240 pounds, that's a 17-pound weight loss. Not quite so insubstantial, right?

Fuel Your Body the Right Way

Pay attention not only to the types of food you eat, but also the portions. The USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends the following:

- Eat a variety of fruits (2 cups per day for a 2,000 calorie diet) instead of just juice. You can have these fresh, frozen, dried or canned. An example would be: one small banana, one large orange and ¼ cup of

dried apricots or peaches.

- Make your veggies more colorful by adding dark green (broccoli, kale, spinach) and bright orange (carrots, sweet potatoes, pumpkins and other winter squashes). Also add more beans and peas to the mix (kidney beans, black beans, garbanzo beans, lentils).
- Eat more calcium for healthy bones. The USDA recommends three cups of low-fat or fat-free milk per day. You can substitute the same amount of low-fat yogurt and/or low-fat cheese (1 ½ ounces of cheese is equal to one cup of milk). Try lactose-free milk if you have trouble digesting dairy products.
- Focus on whole grains. Make them at least half of your total grain intake. Try to eat at least 3 ounces of whole grains per day. This is equal to one slice of bread, 1 cup of breakfast cereal or ½ cup of cooked rice or pasta.
- Go lean with the protein. Opt for lean meats such as chicken or fish. Be sure to prepare it in a healthy manner, such as baking or broiling. Don't forget that nuts, beans and peas are also good sources of protein.

Get Up and Get Moving

On the exercise front, you don't have to join a fancy gym or hire a personal trainer. Try taking the stairs instead of the elevator to your fifth-floor office. Walk down the hall to talk to the person in accounting, rather than sending an e-mail. Do a few walking laps around the parking lot on your afternoon break. You might even inspire some of your co-workers to join you.

The exercise habit also can include the entire family. Try walking the kids to or from school. This also will give you an opportunity to connect with your children and find out what's on their mind. Even weekends can provide lots of opportunity for family exercise. Take a day hike along a nature trail (a perfect chance to learn about native wildlife), bike along the beach, or just go for a stroll in the park. Even taking the family dog for a walk around the block can get your body moving.

Little Changes Add Up

The point is that while it might seem that preventing a major disease such as diabetes is a daunting task, it actually isn't. All it really takes is common sense, a bit of creative planning and a positive attitude. With these three things, you are well on your way to success.

For general information about diabetes, please visit the CDC Web site at **www.cdc.gov/diabetes/consumer/index.htm**. For diabetes prevention information and tips, please visit

www.ndep.nih.gov/diabetes/prev/prevention.htm.

Don’t Be Stumped by Size!

Having trouble figuring out correct portion sizes? The National Diabetes Education Program provides some great tips to help you get your portions right.

Portion size	**Same size as**
½ cut cooked rice or pasta	one ice cream scoop
1 ½ ounces low-fat cheese	four dice
3 ounces lean meat or fish	deck of cards or cassette tape
2 tablespoons low-fat peanut butter	a ping-pong ball

Tina Beychok is an associate editor of To Your Health. Direct questions and comments to editor -at-toyourhealth.com.

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