

Diabetes

There are 2 types of diabetes:

Type 1 is a disease in which the pancreas does not produce insulin, the hormone which helps the body control the level of glucose (sugar) in the blood. Glucose builds up in the blood instead of being used for energy. Insulin is needed to treat this and given in the form of a special prefilled insulin pen with a needle, a syringe (needle) or pump. ⁽¹⁾

Type 2 is a disease in which the pancreas does not produce enough insulin, or the body does not properly use the insulin it makes. As a result, glucose (sugar) builds up in the blood instead of being used for energy. Type 2 diabetes can be managed through physical activity and meal planning and may require medications and/or insulin to assist the body to control blood glucose more effectively. ⁽¹⁾

Prediabetes is defined as a state where the blood sugar is higher than normal but not high enough to be diagnosed as Type 2 diabetes

Why is it important?

Nine million Canadians are living with diabetes or prediabetes. ⁽¹⁾ As the population ages and the number of seniors rises, diabetes is increasing : 1 in 6 senior males and 1 in 7 females have diabetes. ⁽²⁾ High blood sugar levels can contribute to heart disease, kidney disease, vision loss, loss of erection, (impotence) and nerve damage (loss of feeling especially in the hands and feet)

Risk Factors

Obesity, sedentary lifestyle and inactivity, family history (parent or sibling), advancing age, male gender, unhealthy eating habits, high blood pressure and high cholesterol, certain high risk groups (i.e. Aboriginal, African descent), prediabetes, taking certain medications such as cortisone therapy ^{(1) (2)}

Key Considerations ⁽¹⁾

People with diabetes can expect to live active, independent and vital lives if they make a lifelong commitment to being careful about managing their disease. The key things in managing the disease include being physically active , eating a healthy diet (what, when and how much food), keeping within a healthy weight, taking all your medications correctly, managing stress , keeping informed and learn about the disease. Elderly people with diabetes should perform aerobic exercise and/or resistance (i.e. light weights or stretchy bands) training, if not contraindicated, to improve blood sugar control. Diabetes in the elderly is often treated by a different approach from diabetes in younger people. As people age, medications to control diabetes may need to be adjusted and the approach to therapy may be different to lower the risk of low blood sugar (hypoglycemia). You need to discuss with your health care provider (doctor, nurse or nurse practitioner). It is important to keep a record of your blood sugar levels and work with your health care team to keep your blood sugar levels in the target range and enjoy a healthy life.

References

1. Canada Diabetes Association (2014). Retrieved April 23, 2014 from: <http://guidelines.diabetes.ca/executivesummary/ch3>
2. Statistics Canada (2014). Retrieved April 23, 2014 from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-229-x/2009001/status/dia-eng.htm>