

Understanding Diabetes

Diabetes is the sixth-highest cause of death in the United States. High blood sugar untreated over long periods of time can cause many serious health problems including heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, blindness, and gangrene. Glucose (sugar) is the fuel for our bodies and insulin allows this fuel to move from the bloodstream into the cells. Diabetes is a chronic health condition where the body is not able to produce enough insulin. Without adequate insulin, the cells are starved of the glucose needed to function and the sugar levels become increased causing hyperglycemia.

Your blood sugar level is a balance between:

- The type of food you eat.
- How much food you eat.
- The amount of exercise you get.
- The amount of insulin in your body.

Eating too much of the wrong kinds of food or not taking diabetes medicine on time can cause high blood sugar. Infections can cause high blood sugar even if you are taking your medicines correctly. Missing meals, not eating enough food, or taking too much diabetes medicine can lead to low blood sugar (hypoglycemia.)

Prediabetes

Prediabetes is a medical condition where blood sugar levels are higher than normal, but not high enough to be called diabetes. Early treatment can return blood sugar levels to normal range.

Small steps can make a big difference:

- Walking briskly for at least 30 minutes a day, five days a week.
- Parking further from the store, taking the stairs.
- Eating less high calorie foods and eating more salads and vegetables.
- Switching from soda and juice to no-calorie water.

Losing 7% of your body weight can lower your risk for Type 2 Diabetes by 58%

Recommendations to improve your health if diagnosed with diabetes:

- Monitor your blood sugar as advised and keep a log of your results.
- Try to achieve your ideal weight. Proper diet and exercise can reduce or eliminate the need for diabetes medicine.
- Avoid tobacco use and secondhand smoke. The risk of a heart attack in a diabetic is 15 times more likely if you smoke.
- Wear a Medic-Alert bracelet or carry a card in your wallet explaining you are a diabetic. It will assist in emergency care in case you are unable to give this information. You can get one from www.medicalert.org or call 1-(800)-432-5378.
- Always carry a source of high sugar food with you in case you get symptoms of low blood sugar. At the first sign of low blood sugar, eat the sugar source to raise your blood sugar while you seek medical help. Examples include: glucose tablets (found at most drug stores), hard candies, or four ounces of a fruit juice.

GET PROMPT MEDICAL ATTENTION if any of the following occur:

- **HIGH BLOOD SUGAR:** frequent urination, dizziness, drowsiness, thirst, headache, nausea or vomiting, abdominal pain, vision changes, fast breathing, confusion or loss of consciousness.
- **LOW BLOOD SUGAR:** fatigue, headache, shakes, excess sweating, hunger, feeling anxious or restless, vision changes, drowsiness, weakness, confusion or loss of consciousness.
- Chest pain or shortness of breath.
- Dizziness or fainting.
- Weakness of an arm or leg or one side of the face.
- Trouble with speech or vision.

For more information visit:

*American Diabetes Association at **www.diabetes.org***
