



APRIL 2024
SWEET SPRING

CARE CONNECTION

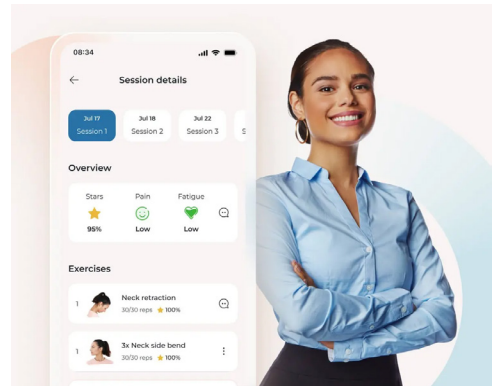
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THE DOWN-LOW ON DIABETES

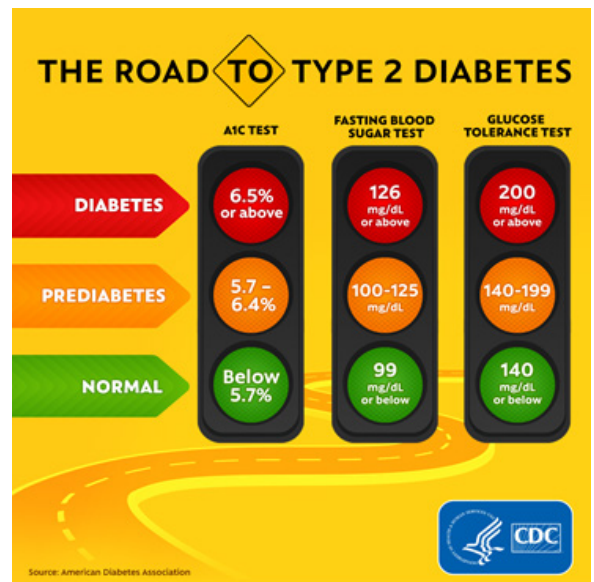
When considering personal health and wellness, diabetes is a condition that requires our attention and understanding. Diabetes is a chronic disease that affects about 38.4 million Americans, both diagnosed and undiagnosed. The different types of diabetes have unique characteristics, challenges, and management.

UNDERSTANDING DIABETES

Diabetes is a chronic metabolic disorder that disrupts the body's ability to regulate glucose. This leads to elevated blood sugar levels that can negatively affect many organ systems over time. There are several forms of diabetes, but the most prevalent forms are type 1 diabetes, type 2 diabetes, prediabetes, and gestational diabetes.

TYPE 1 DIABETES: THE AUTOIMMUNE MYSTERY

Type 1 diabetes can be diagnosed at any age, but often occurs in childhood or adolescence. This type of diabetes occurs from an autoimmune attack on cells of the pancreas, preventing the pancreas



from making the insulin the body needs. It is unknown what triggers the autoimmune attack. With a new onset of type 1 diabetes, symptoms come on fast. These symptoms include increased thirst, increased urination, feelings of extreme hunger, weight loss, blurred vision, irritability, weakness, and fatigue. Type 1 diabetes is often diagnosed when a person is in a state of diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA). DKA occurs when the body does not have enough insulin, and the body begins to break down fat for energy. This causes ketones to start to build up in the bloodstream. The symptoms of DKA are fruity-scented breath, shortness of breath, stomach pain, and confusion. This is a serious condition and requires emergency treatment.

A person diagnosed with type 1 diabetes will need daily insulin to survive. Currently, there is no way to prevent type 1 diabetes, and it cannot be reversed. The best form of management is following your healthcare provider's orders, regular check-ups, and living a healthy, active lifestyle.

TYPE 2 DIABETES: A CHALLENGE WITH RESISTANCE

Unlike type 1 diabetes, where the body cannot make enough insulin, with type 2 diabetes, the cells in the body do not respond to insulin as they should. This is called insulin resistance. The pancreas makes more insulin to get the cells to respond, but eventually, it cannot keep up, and the insulin resistance results in too much blood sugar or glucose circulating in the body. This is when type 2 diabetes begins. Initially, type 2 diabetes may have no symptoms, but the stress and damage to many organ systems are starting to occur. Due to the lack of symptoms, many people with diabetes do not know they have it. After several years of having diabetes, a person may notice tingling in the hands and feet, blurry vision, sores that heal slowly, and more infections than usual. These symptoms are caused by the increase in glucose that circulates and puts stress on the blood vessels, nervous system, skin, and immune system. Damage may also occur to the kidneys, gastrointestinal system, and brain, causing long-term, irreversible damage. Those living with type 2 diabetes have an increased risk of developing other conditions like heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, hearing and vision problems, gum disease, cancer, and skin conditions.

There are several risk factors for developing type 2 diabetes. Age, family history, polycystic ovary syndrome, race, and a sedentary lifestyle all play a factor, but obesity is the leading cause. While not all of these factors can be controlled, good lifestyle choices can make a difference in the effects of type 2 diabetes or even reverse it. Treatment for type 2 diabetes often involves a combination of diet, exercise, oral medications, and sometimes even insulin therapy. If you are over age 35 and overweight or obese, talk with your healthcare provider about your risks for type 2 diabetes. Also, if you are a woman who had gestational diabetes, you are at an increased risk for developing type 2 diabetes later on in life. Make sure your provider is aware of your risks and take the proactive step in being monitored for the development of type 2 diabetes.

PREDIABETES: A PRECURSOR AND A WARNING SIGN

Prediabetes is diagnosed when blood sugars are higher than normal but not high enough to be considered type 2 diabetes. Like type 2 diabetes, many people do not know they have it. Those living with prediabetes have an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Risk factors for prediabetes are the same as for type 2 diabetes. The good news is if you are diagnosed with prediabetes, by making lifestyle changes, you can prevent or delay type 2 diabetes. Lifestyle modifications, including regular exercise and a nutritious, balanced diet, can prevent the progression to type 2 diabetes.

GESTATIONAL DIABETES: PREGNANCY CHALLENGES

Gestational diabetes occurs during pregnancy, affecting approximately 10% of pregnancies in the United States. Hormonal changes and weight gain during pregnancy can lead to insulin resistance, resulting in high blood sugar levels. Gestational diabetes resolves after childbirth, but it raises both the mother's and baby's health risks if left unmanaged. Monitoring blood glucose levels, adopting a balanced diet, and sometimes even insulin therapy is crucial for managing gestational diabetes and ensuring a healthy pregnancy.

DIABETES TESTING

Timely diagnosis and management are crucial in controlling diabetes and preventing complications. Diabetic testing provides valuable insight into managing one of the most prominent health concerns. Testing for diabetes involves various screenings based on risk factors, medical history, and symptoms. Testing is simple, and results are quick and reliable.

DIABETES SCREENINGS

The American Diabetes Association recommends routine screening with diagnostic tests for type 2 diabetes for all adults age 45 or older and for the following groups:

- People younger than 45 who are overweight or obese and have one or more risk factors associated with diabetes
- Women who have had gestational diabetes
- People who have been diagnosed with prediabetes
- Children who are overweight or obese and who have a family history of type 2 diabetes or other risk factors.

Healthcare providers will recommend one of the tests below to diagnosis diabetes.

Hemoglobin A1C (A1C)

- The Hemoglobin A1C test measures the average blood sugar level over the past two to three months. An A1C below 5.7% is normal, between 5.7% and 6.4% indicates prediabetes, and 6.5% or higher indicates you have diabetes. Healthcare providers also use the A1C to evaluate how well blood sugars are controlled in patients already diagnosed with diabetes.

Fasting Blood Sugar Test

- This blood sugar test is measured after fasting (not eating), typically overnight. A fasting blood level of 99 mg/dl or lower is normal; 100 to 125 mg/dl indicates prediabetes, and 126 mg/dL or higher indicates diabetes.

Oral Glucose Tolerance Test (OGTT)

- The OGTT involves fasting overnight, followed by consuming a glucose solution. Blood sugar is measured periodically over two hours. Two hours after drinking the glucose solution, a 200 mg/dL or higher blood sugar level indicates diabetes.

Random Blood Sugar Test

- During this test, blood sugar levels are tested at any time regardless to when the last meal was consumed. A blood sugar level of 200 mg/dL or higher, accompanied by symptoms of diabetes, such as increased thirst or urination, indicates diabetes.

Screening for Gestational Diabetes

- Pregnant women are routinely screened for gestational diabetes between 24 and 28 weeks of pregnancy. The OGTT is commonly used for screening with diagnostic criteria similar to non-pregnant individuals.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS LIVING WITH DIABETES

Once diagnosed with diabetes, ongoing management is the key to healthy outcomes. Use the schedule below to stay on track with testing, screenings, and doctor appointments.

Daily

- Blood Sugar Checks – Record your numbers. Remember to bring the blood sugar log to appointments. The blood sugar log helps your provider make necessary adjustments to medications.
- Foot Check – Diabetes can cause neuropathy and numbness in the feet, making injuries and sores go unnoticed. Use a mirror if you cannot see the bottom of your feet or ask a family member to help. Notify your healthcare provider if you have sores, blisters, corns, calluses, cuts, redness, swelling, or other changes to the skin or nails.

Every 3 Months

- If your treatment has changed or if you are having difficulty maintaining your blood sugar goals, it is recommended to have your A1C checked every 3 months.
- A healthcare provider visit is needed every 3 months, if you need help meeting your treatment goals. During this visit your doctor will review your self-management plan and medication. Remember to bring your blood sugar log or glucometer!

Every 6 Months

- If meeting your treatment goals, the A1C and healthcare provider visit can occur every 6 months. Your self-management plan and medications will be reviewed. Again, remember your blood sugar log or glucometer so that you can review with your healthcare provider. This is vital to determine if your management plan works for you.

Yearly

- Visit your primary care provider (PCP) for annual check-up. Your PCP will perform a physical, write any needed prescriptions, and order lab work.
- Diabetes is a leading cause of kidney disease, and at least annually, kidney function tests are recommended.
- Individuals with diabetes also have an increased risk of cardiovascular disease. Regular lipid profile testing identifies elevated cholesterol levels and reduces the risk of heart disease.
- Diabetes can damage the tiny blood vessels in the eyes. An annual dilated diabetic eye exam can identify problems such as diabetic retinopathy and diabetic macular edema early.
- Hearing loss is two times as common in people with diabetes than in those of the same age who do not have diabetes. Both high and low blood sugar can damage hearing. An annual hearing exam with an audiologist is recommended.
- Individuals with diabetes need to have a complete diabetic foot exam performed by a podiatrist or other healthcare provider at least once a year. The diabetic foot exam checks for signs of injury or infection. The provider may also identify problems with the nerves or blood vessels.

Testing for diabetes plays a crucial role in early detection and successful management. Additionally, individuals with

diabetes require regular screenings and exams to maintain overall good health. By staying up to date with screenings and following your healthcare provider's recommendations, diabetes can be effectively managed, and a lifetime of good health can be experienced.

Sources: Center for Disease Control, American Diabetes Association

WELLNESS TIP!

Embrace Nature to Alleviate Stress

It's easy to become overwhelmed by stress and anxiety. Reconnecting with nature can help curb these feelings and promote overall well-being.

1. Take regular Nature Breaks. Make time to spend outdoors each day, even just a few minutes.
2. Engage your senses fully and practice mindfulness when outdoors. Listen to the rustle of the leaves and chirping of the birds, feel the sun's warmth, smell the scent of the flowers and the ground after a rain. Mindfulness in nature can help you stay in the present and alleviate worries about the past and the future.
3. Engage in outdoor activities. Physical activity like walking, running, biking, hiking, or even gardening reduces stress and anxiety and have been shown to decrease stress more than indoor exercise.



Source: National Institute of Health

EMPOWERING WELLNESS THROUGH LIFESTYLE CHANGES

While managing a chronic condition such as diabetes presents many challenges, making strides toward a healthier lifestyle can pave the way to a healthier future. With early detection and awareness, you can take steps to prevent or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes. Small changes to your lifestyle can lead to big results. Lifestyle changes can help prevent the onset of type 2 diabetes, the most common form of the disease. Prevention is especially important if you're currently at an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes because of excess weight or obesity, high cholesterol, or a family history of diabetes.

If you have been diagnosed with prediabetes — high blood sugar that doesn't reach the threshold of a diabetes diagnosis — lifestyle changes can prevent or delay the onset of disease. Your healthcare provider can help you create a plan and set goals that work for you. Don't hesitate to ask for help along your journey.

If you're overweight, it impacts more than your risk of developing type 2 diabetes. It leads to unhealthy cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart disease, high blood sugar, and even stroke. Losing weight reduces the risk of diabetes. People in one large study reduced their risk of developing diabetes by almost 60% after losing approximately 7% of their body weight with changes in exercise and diet.

The American Diabetes Association recommends that people with prediabetes lose at least 7% to 10% of their body weight to prevent disease progression. More weight loss will translate into even greater benefits. Set a weight-loss goal based on your current body weight. Talk to your healthcare provider about reasonable short-term goals and expectations, such as losing 1 to 2 pounds a week.

A common tool your healthcare provider uses to assess your weight status:

- [Calculate your body mass index \(BMI\)](#).

GETTING STARTED WITH WEIGHT LOSS

Weight loss can be challenging because it involves changing your diet and physical activity. Losing weight also takes time, which can be frustrating. The good news is that you can lose weight and keep it off, even if you've never done it before.

Here's what has worked for some people who have lost weight and kept it off:

- Cutting back on calories and fat.
- Staying physically active most days of the week.

- Eating breakfast every day.
- Weighing themselves at least once per week.
- Watching less than 10 hours of TV per week.

Most people find it easier to make healthy changes in a few small steps instead of all at once. Set realistic goals within a timeframe that works for you, and don't let stalls or setbacks throw you off course.

KEEP ACTIVE AND EXERCISE

There are many benefits to regular physical activity. Exercise can help you:

- Lose weight
- Lower your blood sugar
- Boost your sensitivity to insulin, which helps keep your blood sugar within a normal range

Goals for most adults to promote weight loss and maintain a healthy weight include:

- Aerobic Exercise - Aim for 30 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous aerobic exercise (such as brisk walking, swimming, biking, or running) on most days totaling at least 150 minutes a week.
- Resistance Exercise - Resistance exercise at least 2 to 3 times a week increases your strength, balance, and ability to maintain an active life. Resistance training includes weightlifting, yoga, and calisthenics.
- Limit Inactivity - Breaking up long bouts of inactivity, such as sitting at the computer, can help control blood sugar levels. Take a few minutes to stand, walk around, or do some light activity every 30 minutes.

KEEP A RECORD

Track your food intake and your activity daily. Use your smartphone note app, or keep a small notebook with you all day. Write down everything you eat and drink, including the serving size. There are many free apps and websites that can help you do this.

Keep a journal of what kind of physical activity you do and for how long. It also helps to write down other information, like when or where you exercised, who you exercised with, or how you felt before, during, or after exercise. Many fitness tracker apps or smart devices are available to help track your progress.

Check your weight at least once a week and write it down, or consider how your clothes fit as a measure of weight loss.

Give it a try (even for just a week) to see where you stand.

YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

Many people find it helpful to meet with people who are also trying to lead a healthier lifestyle. It may be a group who wants to lose weight or be more active; this could be online or in person. Consider joining a group for weight loss, exercise, or general support. Or create your own support network by talking with friends and family about your successes and struggles. You may be surprised at how supportive they will be.

Find a walking buddy or friends who also want to improve their health. By doing this, you can support each other while working toward your goals. Creating a friendly challenge to see who can walk the farthest each day can be fun.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

You are not alone if you have high blood pressure; it affects nearly one in three American adults. You may need medication to get it under control. Here are some easy tips to help reduce your blood pressure:

- Work with your healthcare provider to find a treatment plan that's right for you
- Eat whole grain breads and cereals
- Try herbs and spices instead of salt to flavor foods
- Check labels and choose foods with less than 400 mg of sodium per serving. Keep in mind anything "prepackaged" may contain high amounts of sodium.
- If overweight, lose weight or take steps to prevent additional weight gain
- Limit alcohol consumption and consult your health care provider about whether it is safe to drink alcohol at all
- If you smoke, get help to quit

Making a few changes in your lifestyle now may help you avoid the serious health complications of diabetes in the future, such as nerve, kidney, and heart damage. It is never too late to start.

DIETARY CHANGES

Your dietary goal should be to lose weight and maintain a healthier weight moving forward. Healthy dietary decisions, therefore, need to include a strategy that you can keep as a lifelong habit. Making healthy decisions that reflect some of your

preferences for food and traditions may benefit you over time.

Plants provide vitamins, minerals, and carbohydrates in your diet. Carbohydrates include sugars and starches — the energy sources for your body — and fiber. Dietary fiber is the part of plant foods your body can't digest or absorb. Fiber-rich foods promote weight loss and lower the risk of diabetes. Eat a variety of healthy, fiber-rich foods, which include:

- Fruits, such as tomatoes, peppers, and fruit from trees
- Non-starchy vegetables, such as leafy greens, broccoli, and cauliflower
- Legumes, such as beans, chickpeas, and lentils
- Whole grains, such as whole-wheat pasta and bread, whole-grain rice, whole oats, and quinoa.

The benefits of fiber include:

- Slowing the absorption of sugars and lowering blood sugar levels
- Interfering with the absorption of dietary fat and cholesterol
- Managing other risk factors that affect heart health, such as blood pressure and inflammation
- Helping you eat less because fiber-rich foods are more filling and energy-rich

Avoid foods that are “bad carbohydrates”, which are high in sugar with little fiber or nutrients: white bread and pastries, pasta from white flour, fruit juices, and processed foods with sugar or high-fructose corn syrup.

Fatty foods are high in calories and should be eaten in moderation. To help lose and manage weight, your diet should include a variety of foods with unsaturated fats, sometimes called “good fats.”

Unsaturated fats, both monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, promote healthy blood cholesterol levels and good heart and vascular health. Sources of good fats include:

- Olive, sunflower, safflower, cottonseed, and canola oils
- Nuts and seeds, such as almonds, peanuts, flaxseed, chia seeds, and pumpkin seeds
- Fatty fish, such as salmon, mackerel, sardines, tuna, and cod

Saturated fats, the “bad fats,” are found in dairy products and meats. These should be a small part of your diet. You can limit saturated fats by eating low-fat dairy products and lean chicken and pork.

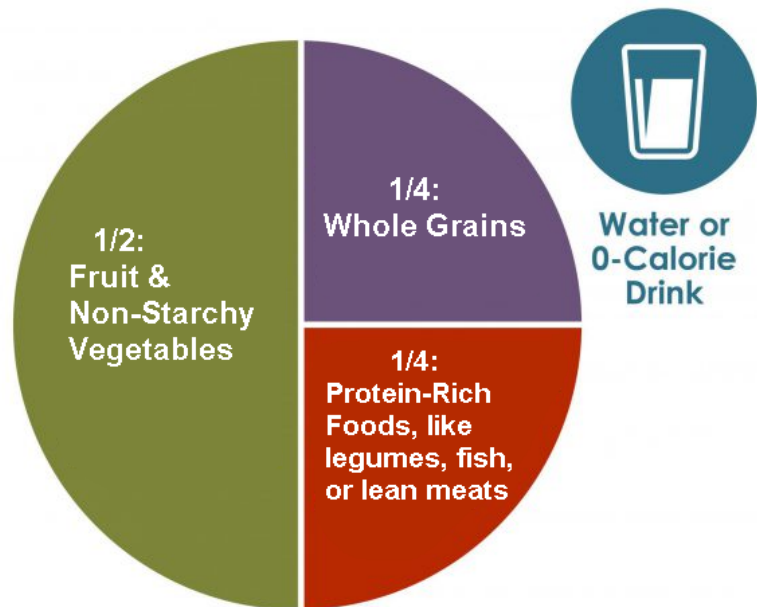
One simple strategy to help you make good food choices and eat appropriate portions sizes is to divide up your plate. These three divisions on your plate in the chart to the right promote healthy eating.

Small lifestyle changes can lead to better wellness. Losing just 10-15 pounds can make a big difference. Increasing your activity and exercise daily can have beneficial effects on your health and overall wellbeing.

Share your concerns about diabetes prevention with your doctor. He or she will appreciate your efforts to prevent diabetes and may offer additional suggestions based on your medical history or other factors.

MEDICATION TREATMENT

Along with lifestyle changes to improve diet, exercise, and weight loss, for most individuals with diabetes, medications play a major role in helping to improve control of blood glucose, promotion of weight loss, and ultimately prevention of other serious health conditions such as heart and kidney disease.



For type 2 diabetics, there are a large number of medication classes (see below) that are effective options. The choice of which medication(s) to use is highly individualized based upon many factors, including risk (or presence) of other health conditions (such as heart failure, kidney disease, heart attack), route of administration preference (oral vs. injectable), and cost.

Medication Class	Common Example(s)	Route of Administration	Risk Reduction to Other Conditions
Metformin	Metformin	Oral	None
Sulfonylurea	Glipizide, Glimepiride	Oral	None
TZD	Pioglitazone	Oral	None
GLP1	Trulicity, Ozempic	Injectable, Oral	Heart disease
SGLT2	Farxiga, Invokana, Jardiance	Oral	Kidney disease, heart failure
DPP4	Januvia, Tradjenta	Oral	None
Insulin	Humalog, Lantus	Injectable	None

Many type 2 diabetics will start with metformin due to its low cost, modest impact on weight loss, and efficacy in lowering blood glucose. However, if patients present with severe disease and other serious health conditions described above, they may be started on therapies from multiple classes to maximize impact.

Over time, most patients will require multiple medications to optimize blood glucose control, reduce the risk of other health conditions, and promote weight loss. While the use of multiple medications can have a significant positive impact on the disease, this does come with additional complexities, such as potentially reduced adherence to therapy, increased side effects, and increased cost. Having open and honest conversations with your healthcare provider and pharmacist is critical in order to help offset these potential complications, as they may be able to assist with different medication combinations (use of generics over brands), dosage requirements, or even financial assistance from the manufacturer.

For type 1 diabetics – as well as some type 2 diabetics (especially as the disease progresses) – insulin therapy remains the mainstay of treatment. Today’s recommended regimens include multiple daily injections, including “mealtime insulin,” combined with “basal insulin” to mimic the body’s natural insulin release patterns. Alternatively, some patients will use a device known as an insulin pump connected under the skin to deliver insulin more continuously. Similar to the use of multiple medications above, optimal insulin therapy should be individualized with consideration given to willingness to learn and maintain the use of insulin pumps and supplies, ability to adhere to prescribed therapy, and cost. Luckily, the cost of insulin therapy has come down substantially over the past several months, with many common insulins (such as Humalog, Novolog, Lantus, etc.) having lowered their price by ~75% or more! With minimal generic options available, this price reduction should substantially help patients access this critical therapy.

Effective diabetes management requires a holistic approach encompassing lifestyle modifications, regular monitoring, ongoing education, and medication. By taking an active role in your care and working closely with healthcare providers, individuals with diabetes can lead an active lifestyle while reducing complications. As always, it is important to talk with your healthcare providers about any concerns and follow the treatment plan you and your provider have agreed upon.

Sources: Center for Disease Control, American Diabetes Association

IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

PPO - Anthem

☎ 1-800-810-BLUE
(Provider locator services)
🌐 www.anthem.com

Rx Drugs - SavRx

☎ 1-866-233-4239
🌐 www.savrx.com

NECA/IBEW Family Medical Care Plan

☎ 1-877-937-9602
🌐 www.nifmcp.com
📍 410 Chickamauga Avenue, Suite 301
Rossville, GA 30741

Dental - MetLife

☎ 1-800-942-0854
🌐 www.metlife.com/mybenefits
(if applicable)

Vision - VSP

☎ 1-800-877-7195
🌐 www.vsp.com
(if applicable)