

Use Teamwork to Stay Healthy with Diabetes

According to a 2010 report from the National Institutes of Health, the risk for death among people with diabetes is about twice that of people without diabetes of similar age. That same report cited an estimated 25.8 million people or 8.3 percent of the United States' population has diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes accounts for 90-95 percent of all diagnosed adult cases of diabetes. It usually begins as insulin resistance, when cells do not use insulin properly. With this condition the body's need for insulin increases and over time the pancreas loses its ability to produce it.

Dr. Paul Schreibman, Lynchburg Medical Center, advises patients with type 2 diabetes to look to others with the same condition for support. "This can have a powerful impact on the health and well-being of individuals with diabetes." Many patients feel completely overwhelmed when they are diagnosed with diabetes. Fortunately, most physicians encourage such patients to join programs so they have an immediate network to help them cope with the reality of this disease.

The reality of diabetes is that it has the potential for many complications: heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure, blindness, kidney disease, nervous system disease, amputations, dental disease, complications of pregnancy, and biochemical imbalances.

Assemble your team "Anyone who joins a program," says Schreibman, "takes an important step in assembling a team to assist in staying healthy with diabetes. Here are areas of concern that can benefit:

You need to take charge of your self-care. Your physician will advise you on reaching a comfort level with monitoring blood glucose, sticking to a meal plan, exercising safely, and knowing what to do if you become ill. Involvement in a program complements this care by helping you stay informed and work through diabetes problems.

Regular exercise is important to improve your body's ability to use glucose and insulin as well as helping to reverse the body's resistance to insulin. A physician or diabetes educator can help design an exercise regimen based on your current level of activity and around things that you enjoy.

Managing your diet needs to be a custom fit. If you change one or two things at a time, you're not anxious about a major lifestyle change. This can also help you recognize any stumbling blocks and work on meal planning with a program's nurse educator or dietician.

Recognize that depression and burnout are common among diabetics—even patients who have been diabetics for five or more years. Learning about this disease alerts you to the critical need of taking care of yourself. There are several ways these problems can be treated, many times on a short-term basis. This is the goal of the Diabetes & You program at Highland District Hospital where diabetics are able to receive support and education from a nurse educator and licensed dietician. The program has achieved official recognition from the American Diabetes Association.