



Fighting Diabetic Complications

Diabetes lasts a lifetime. Uncontrolled blood sugars damage the body. Good blood sugar control can delay and even prevent diabetic complications.

WHAT PROBLEMS CAN OCCUR?

Some common diabetes problems are:

- Large blood vessel disease leading to heart disease, stroke or gangrene.
- Small blood vessel disease leading to eye, kidney disease or gangrene.
- Nerve problems in the legs, arms, hands or body organs.

Keeping your blood sugar in the target range that your doctor wants will help you fight complications.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREVENT COMPLICATIONS?

1. Follow a meal plan that controls calories, carbohydrate and fat.

You may also need to limit sodium to control blood pressure and protein to protect the kidneys. If you have not seen a dietitian in the last two years, you need a meal plan check-up. If you are overweight, a 10-20 pound weight loss can improve your blood sugars and blood pressure.

2. Take your medications as prescribed. Make sure the doctor knows all the medicines you are on. Take all your medicines with you to each doctor visit. Discuss them with the doctor including over-the-counter drugs.

3. See your doctor at least once or twice a year. More frequent visits will be needed if you have problems. You will also need regular check-ups with the dentist. A yearly check-up with a podiatrist (foot doctor) is also smart.

4. Have a yearly check-up with your eye doctor. Early signs of retinopathy rarely are noticed. Only a dilated eye exam can pick up changes. Treating retinopathy as soon as possible protects your eyesight.



5. Check your feet daily for any wounds, red spots or other changes. If you cannot see your feet, have someone else do it or use a mirror. Diabetic nerve damage may prevent you from feeling pain. If the problem goes untreated, you may get infected and risk amputation. At each doctor visit take off your shoes and socks so your feet can be examined, even if no one requests it.

6. Don't smoke. Smoking cuts off oxygen to the tissues and slows healing. It also increases risk for heart attack, stroke and lung disease.

7. Check your blood sugar often. Blood glucose monitoring shows you how food, medicine, exercise and stress affect your blood sugar. Keep good written records and look for patterns. Your health care team can help you find ways to control blood sugars outside your target range.

8. Exercise with your doctor's permission. If you have not been exercising, get a physical before you start. This exam will find any problems that may prevent you from exercising safely. Regular exercise is great for weight and blood sugar control. Risk for heart disease and stroke will also decrease.

9. Learn how to handle sick days. Have a sick day box ready with supplies you will need. Know when to call for help and what information your health care team will want. Ask someone to help you at home if you need it. Learn how to substitute easy-to-digest foods if you can't eat normally.

10. Learn how to manage stress. Good stress reducers are deep breathing, exercise, talking to a friend, massage or reading a good book.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. What can I do this week to reduce my risk for diabetic complications?

2. What additional information do I need from my medical team to protect myself?

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