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Preventing diabetes: One of the most preventable diseases yet most daunting

By Denyse Smith
Niche Products Editor

The statistics are staggering and getting worse every day in America. Diabetes affects 26 million children and adults, and 79 million are pre-diabetic according to the American Diabetic Association.

Julie Feldman, MPH, RD, a dietitian specializing in adult and childhood nutritional needs in the office of Dr. Penny Baumeier, said diabetes related illness accounts for \$174 billion in health care costs every year. \$1 of every \$5 or 20 percent of all healthcare costs are directly related to diabetes care.

However type II, also known as adult onset diabetes, is 100 percent preventable, she said.

Type II diabetes, brought on when the body develops insulin resistance, can be prevented through three key lifestyle changes, said Feldman.

Exercise:

If you are sedentary, adding just 20 minutes of exercise a day will help regulate your blood sugar, lower your blood pressure and raise your healthy cholesterol. It will also promote weight loss, she said.

Being overweight increases your risk of developing type II diabetes, but losing as little as 10 percent of your body

weight will lower your risk.

Feldman said setting a lofty goal may be daunting, but for someone who weighs 250 pounds, the idea of losing 10 percent means losing just 25 pounds. "Lose 25 pounds and you'll reduce your risk significantly."

Diet:

"We eat a lot of high sugar or refined carbohydrates, which are digested very quickly," Feldman said. "People need to revisit what they eat and how they eat."

She suggested checking labels to make sure the sugar on the label is less than 10 grams per serving and that there are more than three grams of fiber per serving. "Fiber slows digestion and absorption and makes you feel satisfied longer," she said, and "It stops the craving for sweet foods."

Lifestyle modifications:

Spread the word about diabetes and diabetes awareness. Feldman said in November you can text the message "T1D4aday" to the number 63566 to experience what it is like to be a type I diabetic. You may not have the ups and downs of blood sugar, but Feldman said the day after you send the text you'll be sent up to 24 texts throughout the day reminding you to check your blood sugar, give yourself insulin and eat.

You can also visit the American Diabetes Association website and

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The difference between type I and type II diabetes is preventability. Feldman explained that in type I the pancreas doesn't produce insulin, and in type II the body is insulin resistant.

www.stopdiabetes.com for ways to make healthy lifestyle choices.

Share the story of how diabetes impacts your life, or someone you love at your local CVS pharmacy. Feldman said a link at www.cvs.com allows you to upload photos of yourself or a loved-one affected by diabetes.

You can also help raise funds for diabetes research. Feldman said research continues into causes and treatments for type I diabetes, formerly known as juvenile diabetes. Go to JDRF.org or the American Diabetes Foundation to see what you can do to help.

"No one is immune to type II diabetes," Feldman said, but it is one of the most preventable diseases. Education is the key.

"Educate your children about nutrition, now," she said, and make sure they understand the risks. "In a lot of families there is a pre-disposition, but if you eat healthy and get the right amount of exercise, you can prevent it."

The differences between type I and type II diabetes, Feldman said, are that type I happens when the pancreas doesn't produce enough insulin. Heredity may or may not be a factor.

In type II, the body has been over-producing insulin for so long, it becomes insulin resistant, Feldman said, and the result is that the body can't use the insulin produced. A healthy diet, exercise and lifestyle change, like quitting smoking can reduce the risks.

When a healthy person eats, insulin is

used by the body so it can turn glucose or sugar to useable energy. When you eat food, your body breaks down the food you eat into usable nutrients. Sugars and starches are broken down into glucose. The insulin takes the glucose from the blood into the cells.

According to the ADA, in diabetics the glucose builds up in the blood stream rather than being carried into the cells, causing fatigue and other symptoms in the short-term. Over the long term though, high blood glucose levels can cause damage to kidneys, heart, nerves and eyes.

Feldman said many people don't know they're diabetic until symptoms become severe, or weight loss becomes evident, and even then many people don't treat it with the seriousness they should.

For both types of diabetes, the symptoms are frequent urination, excessive thirst, extreme hunger, sudden weight loss or gain, and unusual fatigue. With type II diabetes, Feldman said other symptoms are blurred vision and difficult or longer healing times for cuts or scrapes.

It's possible to have blood sugar checked at the same time as routine

screenings for cholesterol and blood pressure, to identify risk of type II diabetes.

If you don't have any symptoms but think you might be at risk, Feldman advocates eating a nutritious diet, exercise at least 20 minutes a day and make the necessary changes to your lifestyle as preventatives.

If you've already been diagnosed or someone else has been, she recommends following your doctor's orders and stay on a healthy food plan for living.

Seeing your dietitian on a regular basis makes a lot of sense, she said, especially when there is a family history of diabetes. She schedules family sessions to work with the all of the members of a family on prevention and planning.

Feldman also recommends checking out websites like www.eatingwell.com for healthy menu planning ideas. The website allows you to plan menus specific to diabetes and help keep your blood sugar levels in check, and provides recipes for most of the foods to take the guess work out of the process.

Feldman can be reached through her website at dietitianjuliefeldman.com, or by e-mail at realnutrition@ymail.com.



Feldman recommends learning to read nutrition labels and shying away from foods that have more than 10 grams of sugar and less than 3 grams of fiber per serving