

Controlling Diabetes

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Almost 5 percent of the U.S. population has this disease. Nearly 8 million Americans must manage this disease on a daily basis with medication or other treatment. Another 8 million Americans don't even know they have this disease. If gone untreated, this disease can cause great physical disabilities and even death. This disease is diabetes. Surprisingly, diabetes ranks as the fourth leading cause of death by disease in America. While insulin is a lifesaver for many diabetics, it's not a cure-all. There are two types of diabetes: insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus type I and non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus type II.

Type I Diabetes

With type I diabetes, the pancreas produces very little or no insulin. While only 10 percent of all diabetics are affected by type I diabetes, it tends to have a higher chance of serious consequences if left untreated. Insulin is a special hormone which opens or unlocks the surfaces of tissue cells, allowing blood sugar to be delivered throughout the body for energy. If enough insulin is not produced, sugar can not go into the body's cells. It becomes too abundant in the blood and can lead to severe complications such as blindness, heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, amputations and even death. Because symptoms for type I diabetes are very distinct, it is usually detected in early childhood or adolescence. Warning signs include:

- frequent urination
- abnormal thirst
- unusual hunger
- rapid weight loss
- irritability
- weakness and fatigue
- nausea and vomiting



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The only way to control type I diabetes is to supplement the body with insulin injections. However, it isn't as simple as taking a shot every day. Type I diabetics must carefully monitor their blood sugar by using a home blood glucose monitor. Taking daily measurements helps doctors track how exercise and diet affect the blood sugar. This information helps them adjust medications and treatment to better control diabetes on an individual basis.

Another method of monitoring blood sugar is to have a doctor take a glycated hemoglobin test. This test estimates an average blood sugar level over a three-month period. By tracking a diabetic's blood sugar over a longer period of time, physicians are able to estimate the risk of long-term complications and develop strategies to normalize blood sugar control.

Besides taking insulin, type I diabetics need to closely follow a daily regimen. Most important is to eat a nutritionally balanced diet and follow a regular exercise program. This helps to maintain a consistent blood sugar level.

Patients should also have annual eye check-ups. Since blindness is a serious side effect of type I diabetes, thorough eye exams can help detect diabetic changes at an early stage that can be treated effectively. Lastly, type I diabetics need to monitor their blood pressure frequently. While high blood pressure does not necessarily indicate a person has diabetes, it can cause significant problems for type I diabetics. High blood pressure must be aggressively lowered as soon as it's detected.

Type II Diabetes

Type II diabetes is much more common, affecting nearly 90 percent of all diabetics.

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Controlling Diabetes continued...

Although some symptoms and treatments are similar between type I and II, the cause of each is very different. To begin with, type II diabetes may not require insulin shots. Patients may actually have an over-abundance of insulin because their bodies cannot efficiently use what the pancreas produces. Many type II diabetics feel fine and won't see any side effects until the disease has progressed into its later stages. Here are a few symptoms to look for:

- unexplained weight loss
- itching
- blurred vision
- tingling, numbness in feet
- extreme fatigue
- skin infections and slow healing
- frequent urination
- abnormal thirst

Type II diabetes has similar complications as type I diabetes, which include vision problems, heart disease and kidney damage. For this reason, type II diabetics should also have regular eye check-ups. Patients especially need to watch their weight too, since obesity is the most common cause of type II diabetes. It is also a major contributor to high blood pressure. Losing weight not only helps to lower blood pressure, it also allows tissue cell surfaces to open up more readily when stimulated by insulin. As a result, more insulin is used, allowing more sugar to reach tissue cells so it isn't trapped in the blood.

Aggressive Treatment

If you have either type I or type II diabetes, you may want to explore some of the new aggressive treatment options that have been recently developed. Members of a diabetic care team track a diabetic's exercise program and blood sugar over an extended period of time. This intense personal study provides quality information for designing a treatment program which is best suited for an individual's conditions. Since symptoms usually begin to

appear in the advanced stages of both diseases, it is extremely important to see a physician as soon as you detect any of the warning signs.

It's also a good idea to find out if your family has a history of diabetes and/or high blood pressure since both are known to be hereditary. Knowing this will give your physician a better idea what risk you run of developing diabetes. Medicine is learning how to combat diabetes and continues to discover new methods to treat it. However, to prescribe effective treatment, patients need to be accurately diagnosed. That's why it is important that you describe any abnormal pain or sensations to your doctor. Know the warning signs of diabetes. Know that diabetes can have serious consequences if not treated.

For more information, call Advanced HealthLine at (262) 512-2880 or toll-free at 1-888-709-2080 outside the Milwaukee metro area, or log on at www.ah.com.

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