



Ontario Home Economics Association

Ask a Professional Home Economist

For Immediate Release

Diabetes: Be Aware and Take Care

By Julie Bednarski, P.H.Ec.

November is Diabetes Awareness Month across Canada - a perfect time to learn how to prevent or to manage a disease that affects more than 9 million Canadians. Today, almost 1 in 4 individuals has diabetes or prediabetes and the numbers are rising. Some experts believe that type 2 diabetes is reaching epidemic proportions in North America.

Diabetes is characterized by abnormally high levels of glucose in the blood. Over time, ongoing elevated blood glucose levels can lead to serious complications including heart disease, kidney disease, nerve problems and even blindness.

Type 1 diabetes makes up approximately 10% of all cases and can not be prevented. It is an autoimmune disease usually diagnosed during childhood or adolescence that prevents the body from producing insulin, which keeps blood glucose levels in check. Type 2 diabetes makes up 90% of all cases, is more likely to be diagnosed in adulthood and can be prevented. It occurs when the body does not produce enough insulin or when the body does not use insulin effectively.

Prediabetes is a condition where blood glucose levels are higher than normal, but not yet elevated to the point where diabetes has been diagnosed. As the name implies, people with prediabetes have a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Prediabetes can also be present without any obvious physical symptoms, therefore, it is important to be aware of the risks before it's too late.

There are some risk factors for type 2 diabetes that we cannot change, such as being 40 years of age or older, having a family history of type 2 diabetes or being a member of a high risk population (Aboriginal, Hispanic, Asian, South Asian, or African descent). There are however, risk factors that we may be able to control by making lifestyle choices, such as being overweight, having high cholesterol, high blood pressure or leading a sedentary lifestyle. The good news is that taking early care to manage your blood glucose levels by eating a healthy diet, engaging in regular physical activity, and maintaining a healthy body weight can prevent, or at least delay, type 2 diabetes.

In Canada we are now seeing record numbers of children and adolescents being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. Parents must take care to encourage life-long healthy eating and physical activity habits in their children to help reduce their risk type 2 diabetes and its many devastating complications.

It's clear that following good eating habits by choosing whole, unprocessed foods such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, lean meats, poultry, and fish can help reduce the risk of developing diabetes. Following Canada's Guide to Healthy Eating can assist Canadians in choosing a

variety of foods from all food groups. It is also important to consume foods that are low in both sodium and fat and high in fibre. Reading food labels can help consumers navigate which packaged foods are the best choices.

Ways to Reduce the Risk of Developing Diabetes

- Limit the consumption of high sugar beverages. Many people are unaware of the amount of added sugar in sodas, fruit flavoured beverages and other sweet drinks, making them a high-calorie choice. A recent Harvard study showed that drinking 1 or 2 sugary drinks per day increased the risk of developing type 2 diabetes by 26% compared with those who consumed less than one sugary drink per month;
- Eat your greens. Recent British research shows that eating an extra serving per day of greens such as spinach, cabbage or broccoli reduced an adult's risk of developing type 2 diabetes by 14 %;
- Make fibre-rich foods such as whole grains and legumes part of your diet to help manage hunger longer and slow the increase of blood glucose levels after meals;
- Incorporate 1 to 2 servings of colourful fruits and vegetables into all meals and snacks. Aim for 7 to 10 servings per day;
- Quench your thirst with water or low-fat white milk instead of pop or sweetened beverages;
- Choose fresh fruit for dessert more often than cakes, cookies, pies, pastries and ice cream;
- Take steps to cut back on added sugar by using foods that are naturally sweet. Sprinkle oatmeal with fresh blueberries instead of sugar. In some recipes, substitute sugar with ripe bananas, applesauce or pineapple purée. Or try 'no added sugar' dates, raisins, apricots and figs for sweetness, vitamins, minerals and fibre to home-made muffins where sugar can be reduced;
- Shop for unsweetened brands of peanut butter, cereal, and yogurt;
- Treat yourself to sweets occasionally, but choose a smaller portion when you do. Reach for one small cookie not two. When eaten in moderation and with attention to portion size, sugar can fit into a healthy diet;
- Participate in regular daily physical exercise. Canada's Physical Activity Guide recommends 60 minutes of physical activity per day;
- Maintain a healthy body weight for your age.

For more information about diabetes or how to incorporate healthier food choices into your diet contact a Professional Home Economist (P.H.Ec.), a Registered Dietitian (RD) or a Certified Diabetes Educator (CDE).

Julie Bednarski, MHSc., P.H.Ec. is a Toronto-based Professional Home Economist and a member of Ontario Home Economics Association. She holds a Master of Health Science (MHSc) degree in Nutrition Communication and is currently completing a dietetic internship to become a RD.

-30-

Ontario Home Economics Association (OHEA) a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life.

For further information, please contact: Ontario Home Economics Association:
14 Totten Place, Woodstock, ON N4S 8G7 Tel/Fax 519-290-1843

Email: nancyohea@rogers.com Website: www.ohea.on.ca