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8 Ways to Prevent Health Problems Related To Diabetes

By [Pamela Cando, MS, RDN, CDN, CDCES, Bilingual Registered Dietitian Nutritionist](#)

November is Diabetes Awareness Month, a time dedicated to raising awareness about this chronic condition. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in 10 Americans has diabetes and 1 in 5 have not been diagnosed yet.

Whether you are living with diabetes or looking to support someone who is, learning how nutrition impacts blood glucose levels can have a positive impact on health and decrease the risk of diabetes-related complications.

This year, Diabetes Awareness Month focuses on preventing diabetes health problems.

Let's break it down.

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition that causes high blood glucose (sugar) levels. It occurs when the body cannot effectively use insulin, a hormone secreted by the pancreas that helps regulate blood glucose.

The most common types of diabetes are Type 1, Type 2, and gestational diabetes. There are other types of diabetes, but all require careful management to prevent complications, such as heart disease, neuropathy, kidney disease, and eye problems.

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) provides recommendations to help prevent problems associated with diabetes. Here are some key strategies:

1. **Monitor your blood glucose levels:**

Monitoring your blood glucose levels as recommended by your health care provider will help you learn how your body responds to different foods, activities, and medications.

You can use a blood glucose meter (glucometer) or a continuous glucose monitor (CGM) to check your blood glucose levels.

Talk to your health provider to learn about your blood glucose goals. Remember that everyone is different, and your goals depend on your age, medications, and other health problems.

2. Balance your plate

Following a plan focused on nutrient-dense foods will help you keep your blood glucose levels in check. All the foods we eat, and the portions of certain foods, can influence blood glucose levels in different ways. Carbohydrates, found in many foods and drinks, have the most impact on blood glucose levels.

To build a balanced meal, consider following the Plate Method. It is a simple and effective way to manage portion sizes and ensure balanced meals for diabetes management.

- First, fill half of your plate (50%) with non-starchy vegetables. Good options include leafy greens, broccoli, peppers, cucumbers, and carrots.
- Fill about one-quarter (25%) of your plate with lean protein. This could be grilled chicken, fish, tofu, beans, or legumes.
- Use the remaining quarter (25%) for whole grains or starchy foods. Choices include brown rice, quinoa, whole-grain pasta, potatoes, bread, or corn tortillas.
- Include a small amount of healthy fats, such as olive oil, avocado, or nuts. This can be drizzled on your veggies or used in cooking.

3. Stay hydrated:

Drink plenty of water. Aim for at least 8 cups (64 ounces) of fluids daily, but adjust based on individual needs. Consider adding slices of lemon, cucumber, mint, or berries for a refreshing twist without added sugars. Limit sweetened beverages and excessive caffeine.

If you choose to drink alcohol, do so in moderation. Drinking alcohol can affect your blood glucose levels.

4. Stay active

Regular Exercise can help you manage blood glucose levels and maintain a healthy weight.

Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week. Find activities you enjoy, which will make it easier to stick to an exercise routine. Start with activities such as walking, swimming, or cycling.

If possible, practice strength training. Incorporating resistance exercises 2-3 times a week can help build muscle mass, which improves glucose utilization by your body.

Remember to consult with your healthcare provider before starting an exercise routine.

5. Avoid smoking

Smoking increases the risk of diabetes complications, particularly related to cardiovascular health. Seek support or programs to help quit smoking.

6. Take your medication as prescribed

Medications to lower blood glucose levels are prescribed when lifestyle changes are not enough to manage diabetes. Taking medications helps maintain your blood glucose within the target range and reduces the risk of serious health issues like heart disease, nerve damage, and kidney problems.

If you have specific questions about your medications, it is always best to consult your healthcare provider.

7. Maintain Regular Health Check-ups

Preventing diabetes-related health problems is an ongoing process that involves support from health care professionals.

Visit your health care providers regularly to keep your ABCs in check.

Focusing on your ABCs —A1C, Blood Pressure, and Cholesterol—can significantly reduce the risk of diabetes-related complications, such as heart disease, stroke, and kidney damage.

Other checkups to keep in mind include eye exams that can help detect diabetic retinopathy early and foot exams that can prevent complications from neuropathy.

8. Look for community support and resources

Engaging with community resources can help you learn about diabetes management. Consider joining local support groups, attending nutrition workshops, or connecting with a registered dietitian who specializes in diabetes care.

For more resources and support, visit organizations like the American Diabetes Association, where you can find valuable information and community connections.

References:

- American Diabetes Association: www.diabetes.org
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/diabetes/
- The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases: www.niddk.nih.gov

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