

## **What Should You Know About Diabetes?**

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Diabetes Mellitus (DM) is a disease in which blood sugar is high (more than 126 mg/dl fasting). The cause of diabetes is either decreased (or absent) insulin function (this is insulin dependent DM type 1) or decreased tissue (like muscle or fat) sensitivity to insulin (this is non-insulin dependent DM type 2). Most (90%) diabetes is type 2. The cause of decreased or absent insulin production is the damage to or destruction of the gland that secretes insulin – called the pancreas gland. The most usual cause of decreased tissue sensitivity to insulin (DM type 2) is obesity. Other causes of decreased insulin sensitivity are aging and/or a sedentary lifestyle. Genetic factors play a role in both types.

### **How does high blood sugar affect my body?**

Over a long period of time, elevated blood sugar can cause accumulation of fat and cholesterol in your small and large arteries. This can lead to hypertension, renal failure (diabetes is the most common cause of kidney failure), blindness (diabetes is also the leading cause of blindness in the United States), heart attack, stroke, and amputations of lower extremities. Also, high sugar can impair the immune system, which can increase the chance of having severe infections.

### **Is diabetes a preventable disease?**

Yes! We can prevent most cases of type 2 diabetes mellitus by treating obesity. That is the reason that we encourage parents who have overweight or obese children to enroll them in sports activities and to monitor their diets. The new recommendation for diabetes screening is that every adult should have their fasting glucose levels checked every year.

### **How do you treat diabetes mellitus?**

Type 1 is treated by insulin injection because there is little or no insulin in the body. Type 2 is treated first by diet and exercise. If these measures do not appear to help, we will start oral hypoglycemic medications. If diet, exercise and hypoglycemic medications do not appear to help, we will treat type 2 with insulin injections to help control blood sugar levels.

### **If I am a diabetic, what should I do?**

If you think you may be diabetic, or you have family members who are diabetic and you have never been checked for diabetes, see your medical provider immediately. Signs of diabetes include unusual thirstiness, increased urinary frequency and unexplained weight loss or gain. If you know that you are diabetic, the following list of goals will help you maintain and improve your health:

- Follow the diet your nutritionist or medical provider prescribes for you.
- Monitor your blood sugars frequently.
- See your medical provider, dentist, or eye doctor frequently.
- Take your medication as prescribed.
- Take a baby aspirin daily.
- Achieve and maintain your ideal weight.
- Exercise regularly.
- Do not smoke.
- Take care of your feet.
- Be aware of symptoms of low blood sugar (headache, tremors, hunger, anxiety) which can complicate the treatment of diabetes mellitus.