

Taking It in Stride

Diagnosed with type 2? Do what you can to avoid complications
by Phyllis McIntosh

No doubt you've heard it before: Having type 2 diabetes means managing it every day and making significant lifestyle changes. But the results are worth it. People with type 2 who are able to maintain their glucose levels in a normal range over the long haul can reduce complications, such as eye disease (by up to 25 percent) and kidney damage (by up to 30 percent).

"Physical activity and nutrition are the cornerstones of diabetes management for people with type 2," says Nadine Uplinger, M.S., R.D., a certified diabetes educator and director of the Gutman Diabetes Institute at the Albert Einstein Health Care Network in Philadelphia.

Move It & Use It

"Exercise lowers blood sugar and helps the body use whatever insulin you are still producing," says Uplinger. "Plus, it helps reduce your overall risk of cardiovascular disease."

Although the recommendation is 30 minutes of moderate activity five days a week, Uplinger notes that "it's important to start with what's attainable and work up incrementally. For someone who hasn't been active at all, getting up and moving for five minutes after a meal is a good place to start."

Meal Management

One important dietary practice, Uplinger says, is to eat meals at consistent intervals so that you avoid going long periods without eating. This is crucial for keeping blood glucose levels steady. "We also emphasize eating more vegetables, more fresh fruit instead of juices, less fat and more whole grains," she says.



Medication

Ask your doctor about using oral medications like metformin and thiazolidinediones to help control type 2. Also, there are two new medications, exenatide and pramlintide, that improve the function of the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas and slow the emptying of the stomach, thus preventing spikes in blood sugar after a meal. Both of these drugs have the welcome side effect of causing weight loss. And for many people, the use of insulin to manage type 2 is not a last resort but a smart tool to achieve control and improve quality of life. Talk to your doctor about your best course of treatment.

True, you must think about diabetes every day. But the more active a role you take, the more you control the disease—instead of it controlling you. ■

