



Health News from the DCF Medical Team

DIABETES

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is life-long, chronic condition that occurs when insulin is not produced or used well enough by the body. Insulin is made by the body, travels through the body via blood and lets sugar enter the body's cells to produce energy. Insulin is essential for the body to be healthy. Insufficient insulin can lead to severe illness, coma and sometimes death. Diabetes care involves carefully balancing insulin, food and exercise.

Type 1 Diabetes: This occurs when the body does not make enough insulin. If the body doesn't make enough insulin, it must be given in injections. It is not caused by eating too much sugar and is not contagious.

Type 2 Diabetes: This occurs when the body can't use the insulin it makes and usually in people who are overweight, physically inactive. It occurs often in adults however it is being seen more and more in overweight children and adolescents. It can sometimes be managed with diet and exercise but usually requires an oral medication or insulin.

Gestational Diabetes: This can occur during pregnancy and can be an indicator of risk for Type 2 Diabetes and heart disease.

What are the symptoms of Diabetes?

- ◆ Symptoms can include frequent urination, bed wetting in children previously toilet trained, extreme thirst, extreme hunger, rapid weight loss, weakness, fatigue, drowsiness, irritability, nausea, vomiting, blurred vision, strange odor to breath (fruity or like nail polish remover), yeast infections, muscle cramps, slow healing cuts or infection.
- ◆ **Low blood sugar:** This can occur very quickly with headache/hunger, pale complexion, clammy or sweaty, shaky, tremors, drowsy, weak, confusion or dizziness, behavior changes and unconsciousness in severely low blood sugar.
- ◆ **High blood sugar:** Increased thirst, frequent urination, fatigue, blurred vision, weight loss over time, irritability, nausea/vomiting and fast heartbeat. Deep and rapid breathing are serious signs of very high blood sugar and require immediate medical attention.

How is Diabetes diagnosed?

The health care provider can do blood sugar and/or a urine test. Another test is the "Hemoglobin A1c" that measures average blood glucose over the previous 2-3 months. Abnormal test results require immediate follow up and further testing to confirm a diagnosis of Diabetes.

What is the treatment for Diabetes?

- ◆ Diabetes requires **daily care and vigilance**. Nutrition is key in diabetes care. Carbohydrates break down into sugar in the body so they need to be carefully controlled every day. It is crucial to recognize and treat high and low blood sugars.
- ◆ Diabetes is managed by balancing insulin, food and exercise to keep blood sugar in a safe and healthy range.
- ◆ Type 1 Diabetes requires insulin replacement 2-3 times a day and sometimes up to 5-6 times a day via injection. For children, this must be done by an adult. Older youth can do their own injections but need supervision by an adult.
- ◆ Type 2 Diabetes may require oral medication and sometimes insulin.
- ◆ Both Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes require careful management of diet, exercise, stress management and daily blood sugar testing with special blood sugar meter and urine testing 2-4 times per day and as needed.
- ◆ **Non-compliance with taking Insulin or oral diabetes medications and with adhering to the prescribed diet can lead to life threatening conditions and long term complications such as blindness, kidney disease, nerve damage, amputation; stroke and heart and blood vessel diseases.**

What are the goals of Diabetes management?

The goals of Diabetes management are: to prevent or delay any complications related to Diabetes by maintaining the recommended blood sugar levels and to minimize high blood sugars and the risk of severe low blood sugar. Social workers in hospital Diabetes Programs can talk with the child and family members about living with diabetes. The medical provider creates a Diabetes management plan for each child that you may ask to review.

References: American Diabetes Association; Childrens Hospital Boston Diabetes Nurse Educator

