

Dodging Diabetes

Type 2 diabetes - the most common form – is when the body doesn't make enough insulin (to lower blood sugar) or can't utilize insulin properly (to turn food into energy). The normal level is 7.0mmol/L ("milli-moles per litre").

Diabetes damages blood vessels and nerves and can cause serious complications and lasting damage: eg. heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, blindness or nerve damage. Over 2.25 million Canadians have diabetes, around 50% being seniors, so it's not surprising that older folks with diabetes need twice as much homecare as others the same age.

Factors leading to the development of diabetes include: being overweight, heredity, a sedentary lifestyle, high blood-pressure, & high blood fats.

Symptoms may include: feeling very tired, being abnormally thirsty, losing/gaining weight, urinating frequently, slow-healing wounds, blurred vision, tingling or numbness in outer extremities, erectile dysfunction. Dentists or eye care specialists may notice changes in dental health or eyes that signal the possibility of diabetes. Lab tests may find protein and blood sugar (glucose) in the urine, but a high blood sugar level after an all-night fast is indicative of the disease.

But the good news is – there IS a way to dodge diabetes, and it's never too late to start.

The first step is to get your blood sugar level measured and then monitor it regularly. That way you have a base line to work with. Some pharmacists give out FREE blood sugar monitors.

Start an exercise program: the CMA recommends 150 minutes of walking each week – which is really only about 20 minutes a day. That's just a 7-minute walk after each meal!

Next is smoking: cut it back, then cut it out. Diet is critical: cut back on processed foods, fatty foods, salt and sugar.

Diabetes is a variable and chronic disorder, but it is – with a little help from you – perfectly manageable.

Follow your doctor's recommendations and most diabetics cope just fine – and with none of those nasty complications.

Note: diabetic seniors should have their feet cared for professionally. Only a foot care specialist should trim the toe-nails of a diabetic senior – because one slip could prove fatal.

[The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) was the reference source for this article.]

This article was written by Alex Handyside, a Certified Senior Advisor and the owner/operator of ScotiaCare Homecare & Caregivers Inc. serving the Eastern Shore and Metro Halifax. ScotiaCare won the Maritime Business Ethics Award in 2006, Alex was the co-recipient of the 2007 Canadian CSA Award of Excellence in Service of Seniors, and is a member of the Serving Seniors Alliance. For more information, visit www.scotiaccare.com