

THE PLAIN DEALER

Time to take ownership of diabetes problem

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I saw a friend at a meeting a few weeks ago. I hadn't seen her all summer, and I couldn't help but stare. She looked great—healthy and energetic. “What's going on?” I asked. “Have you lost weight?”

“Well, yes,” she admitted. “I've lost 35 pounds.” When I asked what was up, she told me she'd been diagnosed with diabetes through screening at work. “I knew I had to make some changes. So I eat better—more fruits and vegetables, healthier foods. Also, I eat less. And I move around more.” She'd attended a diabetes education program at a local hospital to learn more about her disease and has been seeing a dietitian regularly. She's taking two oral medications to keep her blood sugar in line and prevent complications.

Now, my friend is one of the busiest persons I know. She works two jobs and she just bought a house. I asked her how she managed with everything else going on. “Well,” she said. “I talked to a man who takes insulin. He said he just couldn't follow a diet. Me, I'd rather follow a diet.”

What are her future plans? She'd still like to lose 15 more pounds, and she's incorporating more exercise into her daily life. From now on, she plans to walk to work, since her new house is a convenient two-mile walk to her job.

The prevalence of diabetes is growing in America, so it's a good time to evaluate your risk and get screened. If you are at risk, there's lots you can do to reduce your risk through lifestyle changes (losing weight, cutting back on fat, and increasing exercise.) So get going and good luck!

If You Have Diabetes

1. Remember that you can't hand over management of your disease to your doctor, even if you want to. Take ownership.
2. Get educated. Ask your doctor to refer you to a Diabetes Self Management Program recognized by the American Diabetes Association. Most local hospitals and some physician practices offer programs.
3. See a dietitian--preferably one who is a certified diabetes educator--for an individualized meal plan (medical nutrition therapy). Don't try to change your life based on a pre-printed handout. Believe it or not, education about diet and medication is not about saying goodbye to the foods you love. Self management education is the key to freedom and flexibility.
4. Get a meter to test your blood sugar at home. You can't control your blood sugar safely if you don't know what it is.

5. Most insurance plans cover self management education and medical nutrition therapy for diabetes. If yours does not, make your voice heard. Remind them that national guidelines from the American Diabetes Association recommend that all people with diabetes receive individual nutrition counseling and self-management education.

6. Call your state legislator. Forty-seven states have passed legislation requiring that insurers doing business in the state cover diabetes education and supplies, like test strips and meters. Ohio is one of three states that have not.

For More Information

For information on evaluating risk and preventing diabetes, go here

<http://www.diabetes.org/diabetes-prevention.jsp>

For a list of American Diabetes Association Recognized Education Programs by state

<http://www.diabetes.org/education/eduprogram.asp>

To find a dietitian who specializes in diabetes care near you, go to

<http://www.eatright.org/>

Follow the link that says Find a nutrition professional. Enter your zip code and choose diabetes as a specialty.

For more information about diabetes legislation in Ohio, visit the Diabetes Association of Greater Cleveland at

<http://www.dagc.org/advocacy/whydcra.asp>