



Screening for diabetes

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Have you been screened for high blood glucose levels? Most often a standard part of a basic blood test, checking

for elevated blood sugar helps identify the presence of diabetes, or prediabetes. This is good to know.

Before screening became common, the disease was diagnosed when someone started to exhibit symptoms such as unusual thirst or frequent urination, both strong indicators of high blood sugar. Of course, by the time symptoms show up, diabetes is most likely present and prevention is not really an option.

The most common form of diabetes in Canada is Type 2 and it accounts for about 90% of all cases. Previously called 'adult-onset' diabetes because it usually showed up in adults, the incidence of Type 2 diabetes has been increasing, and not just among adults, mostly as a result of rising levels of obesity.

The Canadian Diabetes Association estimates that in addition to the more than 2.4 million Canadians currently affected by diabetes, as many as six million more have prediabetes, putting them at risk for developing the condition. Left untreated, a quarter of these cases will progress to diabetes within five years.

Early detection of diabetes and prediabetes before symptoms (and complications) means steps can be taken to minimize the damage to organs and blood vessels caused by years of high blood sugar. It can also reduce later complications of diabetes such as heart disease, damage to eyes, nerves and kidneys.

Screening is especially important for anyone who has the key risk factors for diabetes. These include being overweight or obese, having a family member with diabetes (parent or sibling), not being physical active, and member of a high-risk ethnic group including First Nation, Asian and Hispanic.

Unlike most chronic diseases, diabetes can be managed effectively, the result being a longer, healthier life. Prevention can reduce the effects of diabetes and its side-effects. Likely half of Type 2 diabetes could be prevented or delayed with healthier eating and physical activity. Imagine that, a disease you can choose not to have!

Once diagnosed, however, Type 2 diabetes requires a lifelong commitment to careful management. That need not be onerous. The first step is to be knowledgeable. That means being aware of the condition. It includes checking blood sugar levels regularly and understanding

the effects of what and when you eat, and what you do as they all play an important role in managing blood glucose levels.

If you have not been tested for diabetes, talk to

your healthcare provider about it. You may discover the test has already been done with no indication of diabetes. On the other hand, especially if you have one or more the key risk factors, this is a great time to discuss the subject. It just might give you a leg up on a better, healthier life.

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