



Diabetes and you

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What do you know about diabetes?

Many people know something about diabetes, but until it hits them or someone close, most never learn much more than “it’s something to do with having too much blood sugar, right?” There is a bit more to it.

Diabetes is a lifelong condition where the body does not produce enough insulin, or cannot use what it does produce. The body uses insulin to convert sugar from food into energy. Not enough of it and the sugar stays in your blood. Over time, high levels of blood sugar cause problems like damage to blood vessels, kidneys and difficulties with circulation.

There are three types of diabetes. Type 1 is when the body produces little or no insulin. With type 2 diabetes, the body does produce insulin, but cannot use it properly. The third type (no, not type 3) is called gestational diabetes and affects women while pregnant, then goes away after the baby is born.

Of the three, type 2 is of the most concern — it affects about 90% of people with diabetes. Fortunately, it is also the one type that we can do something about both in prevention and treatment.

The prevalence of diabetes in Canada continues to grow. That is, more and more people are diagnosed with the condition. 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.

Not everyone has the same chance of developing diabetes. Certain factors increase the risk of developing the condition; some are controllable, others are not.

Being overweight, especially if most of it is around the middle, is a key risk factor. Also important is whether a close family member such as parent or sibling has diabetes. Stress can also contribute as a risk factor. Having had gestational diabetes also increases the risk of type 2 diabetes later on.

In Canada, one more risk factor is very significant: Aboriginal people are at greater risk of type 2 diabetes than other Canadians. And they are likelier to develop it at an earlier age. Why would this be the case?

Many years ago, diabetes was not a concern for Aboriginal people. In earlier times, Aboriginal people needed to be very active to survive, and traditional foods made up their diet. Some blame the changes in lifestyle to more sedentary (less active) and a change of diet away from tradition

for this increase. That these changes have occurred very suddenly, over only a few generations, likely does identify some of the cause.

The good news for most cases of type 2 diabetes is that we can do something about it: eat well, be active and take good care of YOU.

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