

Diabetes

Facts for Older Adults with Diabetes



This brochure was produced by Pfizer and RAND to improve the quality of care for older adults.

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Diabetes

A common disease affecting more than 10% of Americans over age 65

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease in which the blood sugar is elevated (or too high). Almost all older adults who develop this disease have what is called “Type 2” diabetes. Type 2 diabetes occurs because the body cannot properly use the insulin it makes (called *insulin resistance*). Also, the body cannot produce enough insulin to overcome the body’s resistance to insulin. Insulin is a hormone that converts sugar, starches, and other food into energy for daily life. It is a hormone that helps regulate blood sugar.



Why is controlling diabetes important?

Besides having higher amounts of sugar in their blood, older adults with Type 2 diabetes are more likely to have higher blood pressure, higher cholesterol and triglyceride (fat) levels, erectile dysfunction, and infections that do not heal quickly. Compared with people the same age who do not have Type 2 diabetes, older adults with diabetes are at least twice as likely to suffer from heart attacks, stroke, and kidney failure. Proper treatment of diabetes may help avoid these complications.



Facts About Diabetes You Can Use

Control your blood sugar today, enjoy the benefits tomorrow

The link between blood sugar control and fewer complications

People with diabetes whose blood sugar is controlled are likely to have fewer complications. You can help prevent damage to your eyes, kidneys, and nerves by maintaining good blood sugar control.

You can keep tabs on your blood sugar control

The level of sugar in your blood can be measured. Your doctor can test the level of sugar in your blood at the time that blood is taken from your finger or by a regular blood test. Using a simple monitor, you can do this test at home to check yourself daily or at different times of the day.



Using a regular blood test, your doctor also can test the overall control of your blood sugar during the past couple of months. This “long-term sugar test” is also called a “glycosylated hemoglobin” or “hemoglobin A1c” test. Using the results of this test, your doctor can help you understand how well your sugar is controlled. Your doctor can also use the results to design a plan to improve control if your sugar is too high.

Controlling your blood pressure is also important

High blood pressure puts a strain on your heart, blood vessels, and kidneys. The constant strain can damage these parts of your body, leading to heart problems, strokes, kidney failure, and other complications. By controlling your blood pressure, you can reduce the risk of such damage. In fact, blood pressure control is as important as blood sugar control in reducing the risk of complications.



Lowering your cholesterol can help you prevent heart attacks

People with diabetes are at high risk of having heart attacks. Decreasing cholesterol and fat in your blood stream makes a heart attack less likely. Diet, together with cholesterol and fat-lowering medications, can help decrease your risk of heart attack and lower the risk of stroke and blood vessel diseases.

Watch for kidney disease and treat it early

An annual urine test can detect early damage to your kidneys from diabetes. If protein is present in your urine, treatment with a medication called an “ACE Inhibitor” can help delay the development of kidney disease.

Keep your eyes in check – get your eyes examined regularly and you will see results

Routine eye exams are extremely important for people with diabetes, because if there is damage to the eye, it can be detected early and treated. If you notice any of the following symptoms, tell your healthcare provider immediately.

Symptoms of eye problems:

- Blurred or double vision
- Narrowed field of vision
- Seeing dark spots
- Difficulty seeing in dim light



Be sure to have a complete eye exam once a year, done by an eye specialist.

Keep your feet healthy

People with diabetes are prone to foot problems. Because you may have lost some feeling in your feet, you may injure your feet and not be aware of it. Taking care of your feet includes cleaning them each day, checking for cuts or sores and always wearing shoes that fit well. People with diabetes should see a foot care specialist on a regular basis.

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