20 ways to halt pre-diabetes in its tracks

Learn how small changes in your daily routine can help ward off type 2 diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes is a dangerous disease — and one that can be a challenge to manage. It can lead to heart and kidney disease, blindness and many other health conditions. Until a cure is found, people with the disease have to aim for the best nutrition possible, keep their blood sugars in the best control possible, exercise as directed and most likely take medication each day.

Am I at-risk?

In 2010, the CDC estimated 79 million people ages 20 and older in the U.S. had pre-diabetes, and even more are at-risk. Pre-diabetes is when blood glucose levels or hemoglobin A1C levels are above normal, but not high enough to be in the diabetic range. But, people with pre-diabetes are already at a higher risk for heart disease and other complications.

You are at an increased risk for type 2 diabetes if you:
- Are overweight
- Exercise fewer than three times each week
- Have a family history of diabetes
- Are African-American, Hispanic, American-Indian or Pacific Islander
- Are older than 45
- Had gestational diabetes (diabetes during pregnancy)
- Have high blood pressure or cholesterol
- Have a history of heart disease
- Have given birth to a baby 9 pounds or larger
- Have a history of some other endocrine conditions, like polycystic ovary syndrome
Small changes, big rewards
Pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes can often be prevented. And it does not require a complete overhaul of your lifestyle. Research shows that reducing your body weight by 5 to 10 percent, or 10 to 20 pounds for someone who weighs 200 pounds, can cut your diabetes risk in half. Weight loss can also delay the onset of diabetes.

Reduce your risk
The key to stopping type 2 diabetes is to reach a healthy weight and to exercise regularly. The trick to long-lasting weight loss is a healthy diet and regular exercise.

Exercise
Work up to 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise at 50-70 percent of your target heart rate. If your doctor approves, you should perform muscle-strengthening exercises twice weekly. Always check with your doctor before you start an exercise program.

Try these exercise tips to get started:

Exercise does not have to happen all at once.
1 Take a short, brisk walk before work, during your lunch break and after dinner.
2 Do squats while you brush your teeth.
3 Do sit-ups and push-ups during commercial breaks of TV shows.

Find something you enjoy.
4 Walk with friends in a nearby park.
5 Swim at your local gym or community pool. Swimming and water workouts reduce impact on your joints. This is a great form of exercise for people with knee and other joint problems.
6 Gardening or yard work. Use a push mower to cut your lawn.

Get in spurts of physical activity throughout the day.
7 Instead of letting the dog out, walk him around the block.
8 Take the stairs instead of the escalator or elevator.
9 Walk over to your colleague’s office instead of emailing or calling.

Eating right
Eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, and low-fat and nonfat dairy. Try to limit foods high in saturated and trans fat, cholesterol, salt and added sugar.
Start with these tips:

Watch portion sizes.
10 Use a salad plate instead of a dinner plate for your meals.
11 Do not go back for seconds. Limit how often you eat at buffets or all-you-can-eat restaurants to resist temptation.
12 Fill half of your plate with fruits and vegetables. One quarter of your plate should be a carbohydrate, such as brown rice or a baked potato. The other quarter should be lean protein, like grilled fish or skinless chicken.

Eat more.
13 Always eat breakfast. Research shows that people who eat breakfast weigh less than those who skip the meal.
14 Have a snack. Keep healthy snacks — like a piece of fruit and low-fat string cheese — on hand so you won’t need to visit the vending machine.

Stop drinking your calories.
15 Use nonfat milk in place of whole or 2 percent.
16 Request that your morning latte or mocha be made with nonfat milk.
17 Trade regular soda for diet. Better yet, choose water instead of sugary drinks.

Be wary of dining out.
18 Brown-bag your lunch instead of going out to lunch.
19 Have an appetizer as your meal or split an entrée.
20 Save eating out for special occasions and make dining at home a habit.

SOURCES:
• Weight Control Information Network. Active at any size. Accessed: 06/04/2012
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Just diagnosed with diabetes?  
4 steps to take control

You have just been diagnosed with diabetes. Learn what you can do to manage the disease.

You just found out you have type 2 diabetes. You feel a slew of emotions — shock, disbelief, anger, sadness. The thoughts that race through your mind are scary. Shots, blood sugar checks, medications. Do not panic. People with diabetes can live long, healthy lives. Here are four steps to help you get control of your condition.

1 Gather your team!
One of the first things you should do is set up a diabetes care team. This is a group of people who specialize in diabetes care. Your primary care doctor will help you put together a team. Each of these specialists will help you with different diabetes-related issues:

- **Primary care doctor** is in charge of your care. He or she will see you when you are sick and will refer you to other diabetes specialists as needed.
- **Diabetes or nurse educator** helps you manage daily aspects of diabetes. This includes how to take insulin shots and how to identify low blood sugar reactions.
- **Registered dietician** helps you plan a healthy diet.
- **Optometrist or ophthalmologist** (eye doctors) watches for diabetic eye disease.
- **Social worker or psychologist** helps you cope with the emotional side of diabetes.
- **Podiatrist** (foot doctor) helps prevent, diagnose and treat foot complications from diabetes.
- **Dentist** takes care of your teeth and gums.
- **Exercise physiologist** helps develop a fitness program for you.
- **Pharmacist** answers questions related to medication.

The goal of managing diabetes is to keep blood sugar levels under control to prevent complications. Your team will tell you where your blood sugar level should be. You may need to check your blood sugar several times a day to make sure your levels are where they should be. This is especially important right after you are diagnosed, start a new medication or change doses. Your doctor can tell you how many times a day you should check your blood sugar.

2 Learn about type 2 diabetes.
After your diagnosis, you will have many questions. Your diabetes team will be able to answer them — from what foods to eat to how to check your feet. It can be overwhelming, so take it slow. Master one concept at a time to best manage your diabetes.
Here are the first things you need to know:

1. Your body does not make enough insulin or it can’t use the insulin it makes. This leads to high blood sugar.

2. If you do not manage your diabetes well, high blood sugar levels may lead to:
   - Heart disease and stroke
   - Eye problems that can lead to blindness
   - Damage to nerves and blood vessels that can cause numbness and circulation problems, especially in your feet
   - Kidney problems that can lead to kidney failure
   - Gum disease and tooth loss

3. Treatment for diabetes involves helping your body use insulin better. This is done by making lifestyle changes and taking medication. Some people will need to take insulin shots.

3. Know your ABCs.

   Your risk for complications from diabetes will be lower if you manage your diabetes ABCs. Work with your diabetes team to manage them. Recommended ABC levels are:
   - **A is for A1C: below 7 percent.**
     A hemoglobin A1C test shows what your average blood sugar level has been over the past 2 to 3 months.
   - **B is for blood pressure: less than 130/80 mm Hg.**
   - **C is for cholesterol: LDL below 100 mg/dL.**

   Your doctor will let you know if your target ABCs are different from the recommendations.

4. Follow your treatment plan.

   To help control blood sugar levels, your diabetes team will help you develop treatment plans. The four main components of your treatment plan are:
   - **Nutrition.** A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and nonfat dairy and low in fat, sodium and cholesterol will help you manage your diabetes.
   - **Exercise.** Check with your doctor before you start an exercise program. Exercise is great for people with diabetes because it can lead to better blood sugar control and increased energy.

   - **Insulin injections.** Insulin injections lower blood sugar levels by making up for the body’s inability to make enough insulin.
   - **Oral diabetes medication.** These medicines lower blood sugar levels by improving the release of insulin, reducing blood sugar or lowering insulin resistance.

Controlling diabetes is not easy. It takes time and commitment. With some lifestyle changes and a positive attitude, managing diabetes is very doable.

**SOURCES:**
- National Diabetes Education Program. 4 steps to control your diabetes. For life. Accessed: 02/24/2009

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Diabetes and heart disease: The ABCs of prevention

When you have diabetes, keeping track of your blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol levels can help cut your risk of heart disease.

Diabetes is commonly associated with a greater risk for blindness, infections and amputation. Those are serious problems.

But adults with diabetes are also two to four times more likely than those without diabetes to die from heart problems or to have a stroke. In fact, cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of early death for people with diabetes.

Over time, high blood sugar levels are associated with more fatty deposits in the walls of blood vessels. Fatty materials can build up and form a plaque. This can narrow or block blood vessels. Plaque can make it more likely that a clot will form. This can restrict blood flow to your heart.

Controlling your blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol can help lower your risk of heart disease. You should get regular tests for all of these. And if all of these levels are normal, that’s fantastic. It’s absolutely vital that you keep them in the normal range by maintaining a healthy lifestyle and following your diabetes management program.

However, others with diabetes may already have high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

That said, if you do have diabetes, you can help keep those levels in check by taking important lifestyle steps.

Eat heart-healthy foods

Eating the right mix of protein, fat and carbohydrates may vary according to each person’s needs. However, knowing the amount of carbohydrates you are taking in will help you control your blood sugar. Include 14 grams of fiber for every 1,000 calories in your diet. High-fiber foods include oatmeal, whole-grain breads and cereals, dried beans and peas and fruits and vegetables.

Cut down on foods with saturated fat. These include fatty meat, poultry skin, butter, dairy products with fat, lard and tropical oils. Limit your saturated fat intake to less than 7 percent of total calories.

Keep your cholesterol to 200 milligrams a day. Cholesterol is found in meat, eggs and dairy. If you already have heart disease, your doctor may want you to eat even less cholesterol each day.

Look in the nutrition facts section of food labels to find out if a product has trans fat. It can be found in crackers, cookies, microwave popcorn, cake mixes and salad dressings. Trans fat can raise blood cholesterol. Avoiding trans fat is the goal.
Diabetes

Get moving

Think of small ways to increase your activity level, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator. But make sure you check with your doctor first to determine the safe level of exercise for you.

Try to get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise spread over at least three days a week. Don’t go more than two straight days without exercise Provided you don’t have any contraindications, people with type 2 diabetes should also aim to do muscle-strengthening exercises for the major muscle groups at least two days a week. Always get your doctor’s approval before starting an exercise program.

Limit alcohol

If you choose to drink, limit your intake. Men should aim for two drinks or less per day. Women should aim for one drink or less a day.

Slim down

Talk with your doctor about how much weight he or she wants you to lose if you are overweight. Ask a registered dietitian for help with meal planning. And go slowly. Aim to lose no more than 1/2 to 2 pounds each week.

Ditch the cigarettes

Smoking doubles your risk of getting heart disease. It cuts the amount of oxygen that goes to your organs, raises bad cholesterol and raises blood pressure.

Make a quit plan. Set a quit date and tell people what it is. Write down your reasons for quitting. Toss your cigarettes, matches, lighters and ashtrays. Ask a friend who smokes to quit with you. Resources like smokefree.gov provide advice, information and encouragement.

Ask your doctor about aspirin

Studies have shown that low doses of aspirin each day can help cut the risk of a heart attack or stroke in some people. But aspirin is not right for everyone. Be sure you get medical advice before taking it.

If you have diabetes as well as high blood pressure or high cholesterol, here are some additional steps you could take.

Blood pressure

Follow your doctor’s instructions for taking your blood pressure medications and incorporating lifestyle changes. Those include adopting a Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH)-style diet, losing weight, lowering your sodium intake, increasing your potassium intake, moderating your alcohol intake and getting more physical activity.

Cholesterol

Eat less saturated fat, cholesterol and avoid trans fat. Eat more omega-3 fatty acids, fiber and plant sterols/stanols. Those are substances that keep the body from absorbing cholesterol. Follow your doctor’s guidance for losing weight and getting more exercise. Your doctor may also prescribe statins.
If you already have heart disease, it’s crucial that you work with your doctor to prevent any further events. Your doctor may give you different (stricter) lifestyle recommendations. You can do it. Just be sure to work with your team, take your medications, live a healthy lifestyle and keep all of your medical appointments.

Heart disease — and its prevention — should be taken seriously. But stay optimistic. You do have control over your diabetes and its threats.

**SOURCES:**


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