

- Virus

Diabetes increases the risk for severe symptoms of COVID-19

What you should do to keep your blood sugar at bay

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“Diabetes has been increasingly common in the past 30 years and there are now more than 400 million people living with diabetes in the world. Unfortunately, about one half of them do not know they have diabetes. They have not been diagnosed. And of those who are diagnosed, many do not have access to medicines nor health services that they need. This pandemic has shown that people with diabetes are at higher risk than people without diabetes of having a severe illness of COVID and also dying of COVID,” explained Dr. Gojka Roglic in the World Health Organization’s video and audio series entitled Science in 5 released recently.

In the Philippines, diabetes mellitus ranked fourth in the leading causes of death in 2020 according to the Philippine Statistics Authority. Diabetes increases the risk of having severe symptoms of COVID-19 and dying of the disease because of two possible reasons: being immunocompromised (having a poor immune system) and a body with high blood glucose become an environment that is conducive for the virus to thrive and multiply.

Being in lockdown for 16 months is also not ideal for everyone, most especially those with diabetes, as it has greatly impacted lifestyle and habits. “The pandemic and subsequent lockdown have directly affected diabetes control. There is the lack of accessibility, the limitation of movement and lack of exercise, and an increase in anxiety and fear among patients and their families,” said Dr. Gilbert Vilela, vice president of the Philippine Heart Association.

We may not be in control of the pandemic but we can take control of our blood sugar level by adapting a healthier lifestyle. Dr. Michael Villa, president of the Philippine Society of Endocrinology, Diabetes, and Metabolism, emphasizes the need for a change of behavior and lifestyle change. “Type 2 diabetes makes up about 85 percent of patients with diabetes. These patients have multiple risk factors. Some are smokers, some are hypertensive, some have cholesterol problems. There should be a national coordinated effort to continue preventing other non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, and this is one of the things we are encouraging.”

Controlling your blood glucose level will also prevent you from having complications such as heart diseases, kidney failure, and cancer. Modifying one’s behavior and lifestyle is always easier said than done. That is why it is important to be realistic. Do not try to do everything at once lest you get overwhelmed. Begin with these practical steps to keep your blood glucose level at bay.

Stay hydrated. Mindfully drinking water regularly throughout the day will keep you hydrated. This will be helpful in boosting your metabolism. Your muscles will be able to burn more energy aka glucose. Always have a bottle of water around you.

Fill up on fiber. Consume 1/2 to one cup or even more of vegetables per meal. Choose whole grains like black, red, and brown rice, oats, rootcrops for better glycemic control. Have about one serving of fruit with your meal. If you must eat white rice, it is best served reheated. The second reheating of rice makes it form resistant starch, which decreases the impact on the blood glucose level.

Move mindfully. If you have been sedentary for quite some time, it is not advisable to get started with strenuous exercises. Begin by being more physically active. Set your alarm to remind you to walk for 10 to 15 minutes, two to three times a day. Take the stairs, walk in place while watching TV, or pace while talking on the phone. Be creative. Just get moving. Follow your body clock. Being aligned with your circadian rhythm is important in managing your blood sugar. It is not good to eat late at night because the body does not produce much insulin hormone to help with digestion and absorption. Moreover, late night snacking will mess up with your sleep hormone. Inadequate sleep is associated with many health conditions, including insulin resistance and diabetes.

Rest and manage your stress. Whenever you feel that you don't have the time to rest, then that is the best time to pause and rest, even just for a few minutes of deep breathing, praying, meditating, listening to music, or simply just staying still. It is important to schedule your rest in a day, in a week. Elevated stress hormones, specifically cortisol, influence blood glucose control. Increased cortisol levels also stimulate the body to store more fat in the belly area. The visceral or abdominal fat deposits are associated with elevated blood glucose and blood lipids (cholesterol and triglycerides) levels.

Remember to always look at progress instead of perfection when it comes to adapting lifestyle change. Boost your immunity against COVID-19 by controlling your blood glucose.
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