

Managing diabetes prudently

The Sun (Malaysia) · 14 Nov 2022 · 8 · Letters@thesundaily.com Dr A. Soorian Seremban

IT is said that one out of five in our country suffers from diabetes, which is quite alarming. It is an added strain on our already overstretched health resources.

Routine screening with diagnostic tests for Type 2 diabetes must be done for the following:

1. Children and those below 45 years who are overweight or obese and who have a family history of Type 2 diabetes or other risk factors.
2. Women who have had gestational diabetes.
3. Those who have been diagnosed with pre-diabetes.

Excess body weight or obesity, high cholesterol, or a family history of diabetes predispose one to this ailment.

Lifestyle changes can prevent serious future health complications of diabetes, such as nerve, eye, kidney and heart damage or delay the onset of this disease.

There is no cure for diabetes but in the recent issue of the British Medical Journal, experts say that “if you follow the advice of your doctors and nutritionist and make an effort to lose weight, diabetes can be reversed by normalising your blood sugar levels without medication early in the course of the disease, that is the first three to five years”. This remission may be temporary and diabetes can bounce back without warning. Therefore, the need for continuous monitoring is always necessary.

Lose extra weight

The American Diabetes Association recommends that “people with prediabetes lose at least 7% to 10% of their body weight to prevent disease progression. More weight loss will translate into even greater benefits ”.

Be more physically active

Regular physical activity like brisk walking, biking or jogging for about 20 minutes a day will encourage weight loss and lower your blood sugar. Sitting for long periods e.g. in front of a computer must be avoided. Every 30 minutes or so of sitting must be punctuated by standing up, walking around or engaging in some stretching of the limbs.

Resistance exercise like lifting weights, yoga and calisthenics increase your strength and balance.

One guideline to help you make good food choices is to divide your plate into three divisions: One half – fruit and non-starchy vegetables, one quarter – whole grains, one quarter – protein-rich foods, such as legumes, fish or lean meats.

Eat plant-based foods

Plants provide vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates (the energy sources for your body) and fibre or roughage in your diet. Fibre helps not only for bowel movement but also interferes in the absorption of dietary fat and cholesterol and slows the absorption of sugars. It is also more filling and helps you eat less.

Avoid foods that are “bad carbohydrates”

Foods that are “bad carbohydrates” are high in sugar, with little fibre or nutrients e.g. white bread and pastries, pasta from white flour, and processed foods with sugar or high-fructose corn syrup.

Eat healthy fats

Fatty foods are high in calories and should be eaten in moderation. To help lose and manage weight, your diet should include a variety of foods with unsaturated fats, sometimes called “good fats”.

Unsaturated fats – both monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats – promote healthy blood cholesterol levels and good heart and vascular health.

Sources of good fats include olive, sunflower, safflower, cottonseed and canola oils, nuts and seeds such as almonds, peanuts, flaxseed and pumpkin seeds. Also fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, sardines, tuna and cod.

Saturated fats, the “bad fats”, are found in dairy products and meats. These should be a minor part of your diet. You can limit saturated fats by eating low-fat dairy products and lean chicken.

The aim of your dietary map should be to lose weight and then maintain that optimal weight moving forward in the long run.

Although the bottom line in managing diabetes is that ultimately you are your own doctor, be free to share your concerns with your health provider whenever necessary.