Diabetes complications can be prevented with early action, experts say

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EARLY detection and proper blood sugar control are critical to preventing serious diabetes complications, experts said, stressing that it is uncontrolled diabetes—not the medication used to treat it—that leads to long-term health problems. With timely diagnosis and appropriate management, many complications can be prevented or significantly delayed.



"If you are prediabetic, it can be prevented and you can still live a life without diabetes. Even if you do have diabetes, the complications of diabetes can be prevented or very much delayed. You can be free from all the complications, kidney failure, amputations, blindness, and heart problems. These things can be prevented. As long as you maintain a healthy lifestyle," said Dr. Lora May Tin Hay, Assistant Head of the Diabetes, Thyroid, and Endocrine Center at St. Luke's Medical Center–quezon City (SLMC-QC).

Dr. Tin Hay and Dr. Patricia Maningat, Head of the Center for Diabetes, Thyroid, and Endocrine Disorders at St. Luke's Medical Center– Global City (SLMC-GC), discussed diabetes in a recent episode of "MD in Focus," the hospital's official educational video series hosted by Dr. Geraldine Zamora.

Managing diabetes requires a balanced approach that combines healthy eating, regular physical activity, and prescribed medication when needed. The experts emphasized that a healthy diet does not require severe food restrictions. Instead, nutritious meals can remain enjoyable and satisfying while supporting long-term health.

"The medications are there to help our patients and it's not going to be destroying the body parts as so many people hear. But if once we get our blood sugars controlled, the complications can be avoided," explained Dr. Tin Hay.

"It's not the medications that cause the complications. It's uncontrolled diabetes," Dr. Maningat reiterated.

DR. Tin Hay said diabetes affects an estimated seven to eight percent of the population, although many cases remain undiagnosed. Many people, often because of limited awareness or inadequate access to healthcare, have yet to receive a proper diagnosis.

Diabetes often develops silently without obvious symptoms. However, as blood sugar levels continue to rise, clear warning signs begin to appear. Dr. Maningat urged the public to watch for the

classic “3 Ps” of diabetes: polyuria (frequent urination), polydipsia (excessive thirst), and polyphagia (constant hunger).

Driven by high blood sugar (hyperglycemia), these symptoms often occur together, although they do not always appear at the same time. Another important warning sign is unexplained weight loss, which may indicate that the body is no longer able to properly use glucose for energy.

Diabetes is diagnosed through several standard blood tests that measure blood glucose under different conditions. A diagnosis may be made if a patient has a fasting blood sugar level of 126 mg/dl or higher; a twohour blood sugar level of 200 mg/dl or higher during a 75-gram oral glucose tolerance test; a random blood sugar level of 200 mg/dl or higher in someone experiencing classic symptoms such as frequent urination or excessive thirst; or an Hba1c level of at least 6.5 percent, which reflects average blood sugar over the previous two to three months.

In people without obvious symptoms, standard medical guidelines generally recommend confirming the diagnosis with two abnormal test results obtained either from separate tests performed at the same time or from the same test repeated on another day.

DR. Maningat explained that diabetes is influenced by multiple risk factors rather than a single cause. Genetically, it involves several contributing genes rather than one isolated factor. Having a family history of diabetes can significantly increase a person’s risk of developing the disease.

Beyond genetics, lifestyle plays a central role. Major risk factors include physical inactivity, excessive carbohydrate intake, excess body fat, and being overweight or obese.

“Commonly, we think about diabetes as just elevated blood sugar, but it is more than that. It is not just about the number. When you have elevations in your blood sugar level, you are more prone to complications such as eye, kidney, and nerve problems. Additionally, your risk of having a heart attack or stroke is much higher once you have diabetes and your blood sugar goes out of range,” said Dr. Tin Hay.

Emphasizing the importance of early medical intervention, Dr. Maningat and Dr. Tin Hay highlighted St. Luke’s comprehensive approach to diabetes care. The hospital combines specialized endocrinology services with patient education, foot screening, and weight management programs. A multidisciplinary team—including cardiologists, nephrologists, neurologists, and other specialists—works together to help prevent and manage diabetes-related complications.