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How can I manage my diabetes?

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Diabetes is a condition in which blood sugar (glucose) levels are too high. Type 1 diabetes, which usually arises during childhood, involves inadequate production of insulin, a hormone that enables cells to use glucose for energy. People with type 1 diabetes need to take insulin, administered via daily injections or a pump.

Type 2 diabetes typically occurs later in life, when cells in the pancreas no longer produce enough insulin or cells are unable to use it, a condition known as insulin resistance. It may be preceded by a milder form called prediabetes, when blood sugar levels are higher than normal but not high enough to be classified as diabetes. Some people develop another form, gestational diabetes, during pregnancy.

Risk factors for type 2 diabetes include overweight or obesity, lack of physical activity, older age, family history and being Black, Latino or Native American. This type of diabetes is often accompanied by abdominal fat accumulation, high blood pressure and abnormal blood fat levels (collectively known as metabolic syndrome).

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends screening for prediabetes and type 2 diabetes in people with overweight or obesity starting at age 35 (recently lowered from 40).

Regular blood glucose monitoring, weight loss, exercise and a healthy diet are keys to managing type 2 diabetes and stopping prediabetes from advancing. Experts recommend eating a balanced diet low in sugar and fat, getting at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week and quitting smoking. Some people with type 2 diabetes may need oral medications or insulin.

Unmanaged diabetes can lead to serious health problems, including heart disease, kidney disease and nerve damage, so it’s important to keep blood sugar under control.

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