

Diabetes: Monitoring your lifestyle

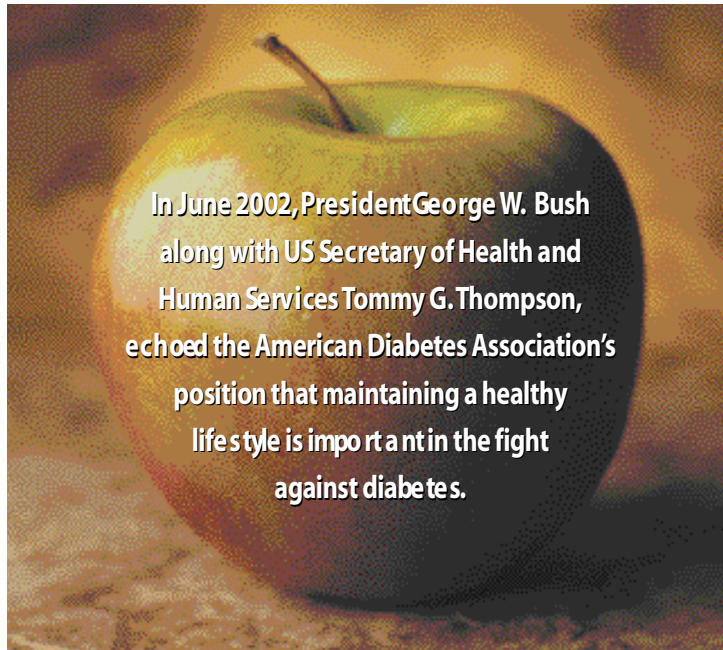
By Craig M. Wax, DO

This “DO Touch” column is designed to provide physicians with information they can use and share with their patients.

Diabetes consists of a spectrum of insulin secretion and insulin resistance disorders that include impaired glucose tolerance, gestational diabetes, type 1 and type 2 diabetes. These syndromes may be asymptomatic and not recognized. In later stages, they can be generally characterized by elevated blood sugars, fatigue, excessive thirst and weight gain. If untreated, patients with diabetes may develop complications. These include cardiovascular disease and end-organ damage, such as heart attack, stroke, blindness and kidney failure. Females have a four-fold cardiovascular disease risk while males have a two-fold risk.

The good news is that if you can bring your sugars down to normal levels and minimize your cardiovascular risk factors, you can lead a long and healthy life without major end-organ damage.

Normal fasting blood sugar levels may range from 65 to 110. The standard postprandial blood sugar is taken two hours after a meal. The normal level is less than



140. Patients with blood sugar levels of 140 to 200 are considered glucose intolerant. If that blood sugar is greater than or equal to 200, it is suspicious for diabetes.

Nonfasting is defined as after meals (postprandial) or anytime (casual). These numbers are monitored at home with a portable glucometer. You and your physician should set up a monitoring

schedule for both fasting and nonfasting values. Enter these values on a pocket calendar or your portable computer so that you can discuss them with your physician at each visit. Or, write them down in order as they relate to date and meals by preparing a chart. *See Figure 1.*

A healthy lifestyle is essential to managing diabetes and preventing complications. Exercise, diet, avoidance of toxins and complying with your treatment plan are all part of the recipe for success.

Exercise is critical to minimizing diabetic complications, as well as managing weight and improving whole body health. Stretching and flexibility routines will help you prepare for and warm down from your exercise routine. At least 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise every other day will optimize your

Figure 1
Monitor your glucose levels as they relate to date and meals.
Use this chart to track your levels and for review with your physician.

DATE	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Bedtime
4/5	100		91	
4/6		275		127
4/7	90	200		



body's performance on all levels.

Dietary food choices, meal portions and eating meals on schedule are essentials in the diabetes treatment lifestyle. Simple carbohydrates (sugars) need to be replaced by complex carbohydrates and fiber. Simple carbohydrates have a high glycemic index. This means that the food potentially and quickly raises blood sugar when you eat it.

Protein and fat intake are also important. Protein is an important part of the diet, but in excessive quantities may decrease kidney function and bone density. Protein intake should be accompanied by increased water intake to flush out acids that are produced by their metabolism.

Saturated fat and fried foods should be avoided. Unsaturated fats and oils, like olive oil, are better choices. Adequate water intake is important to dilute the blood's sugars and cholesterol, to maintain total body hydration and to help flush the system to keep kidneys

Keep your diet in check

Your food choices make a world of difference when it comes to controlling diabetes. This is due in part to the fact that the body becomes oversensitive to carbohydrates, especially simple carbohydrates. These are the starches and sugars. Simple carbohydrates come in foods such as soft drinks, white bread, potatoes and pasta. Certain complex carbohydrates like oatmeal are much better tolerated.

Protein is obtained from animal sources like eggs, poultry and meat. It can also be obtained from low-fat plant sources. This includes soy products like tofu.

Fat is a source of nutrition and energy, but saturated fats and cholesterol from animal sources should be avoided. These include bacon, cheese, egg yolks and shellfish. Better sources of fat and oils are unsaturated fats such as olive oil, fish and natural peanut butter.

Last but not least, fiber is important for the health of the digestive system. Fiber reduces the risk for diverticulosis and can lower cholesterol absorption. Sources of fiber are whole grains like oatmeal, whole wheat breads and high-fiber cereals.

Unless your physician directs you otherwise, don't forget to drink six to eight glasses of water every day to help your body work at peak efficiency.



healthy.

Toxins like tobacco smoke should be avoided. Tobacco smoke contains many poisons that cause cardiovascular disease by themselves. Teamed up with poorly controlled diabetes, tobacco smoke causes rapid and extensive blood vessel damage.

Alcohol is a source of calories without other nutritive value and can be toxic to the liver. It can also interfere with your medicine.

The diagnosis of diabetes is made through patient history, physical examination, blood testing and urine testing. Diabetes requires consistent monitoring and treatment from your physician.

After a diagnosis of diabetes is established, patients should receive diabetic education. A visit to the nutritionist is also called for. Depending on the severity of your diabetes at the time of diagnosis, medicines may be required. Regular eye care by an ophthalmologist and regular foot care by a podiatrist are part of the plan.

Home blood sugar monitoring and regular laboratory blood testing will

help you and your physician bring diabetes under control. Further testing for cardiovascular disease and other health concerns may need to be addressed as diabetes predisposes patients to multiple problems. Fear not, a plan of care and follow up can prevent many of the problems.

A good preventive game plan is based on building a healthy lifestyle that includes diet and exercise and in some cases medications. Prioritize your goals and continue to monitor and modify your treatment plan in conjunction with your physician. Taking these actions early on will ensure you the best opportunity for success.

Craig M. Wax, DO, is board certified in family medicine and osteopathic manipulative treatment. His solo practice is at 53 S. Main St., Mullica Hill, NJ 08062.

Dr. Wax can be reached by calling (856) 478-4780. Dr. Wax also serves as the Web master at www.HealthIsNumberOne.com, a health information Web site. He can be reached via e-mail at info@HealthIsNumberOne.com