Diabetes: It's more than a little sugar

Let us know how access to this document benefits you
Follow this and additional works at: http://jdc.jefferson.edu/photonovels
Part of the Medicine and Health Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation
http://jdc.jefferson.edu/photonovels/1
Thomas Jefferson University Hospital would like to acknowledge the following community participants for their assistance in the development of this informational booklet:

Lena McKnight
Teresa Booker
Darlene Walker
Alice Berry
Velvet Lewis
Sheila Burton
Stephanie Jacobs
Michael Erby
Geneva Scott
Sister Anne Kappler (Project H.O.M.E.)

Thomas Jefferson University Hospital – Office to Advance Population Health

Design: JeffGraphics, Thomas Jefferson University Hospital

Sponsored by Quality Insights of Pennsylvania:
Under contract with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), protects Medicare patient rights and works collaboratively with health care providers and communities in Pennsylvania to improve the quality of healthcare delivered. To learn more about this non-profit organization, visit www.qipa.org or call 1-800-MEDICARE and ask for information about Quality Insights of Pennsylvania.

Medicare
1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227)
TTY (1-800-486-2028)
www.medicare.gov
Hey Anthony, I haven’t seen you around. Where you been? What’s going on lately.

I’ve been taking care of my mom a lot at her place. She has real problems with her sugar.

You mean her diabetes?

Yeah, her sight isn’t too good because of her sugar.

My mother told me that her father had problems with his sugar, but I don’t really know what it’s all about. I’ve been worried that I might get it someday. But how do you even get it? It seems like lots of people I know have a little sugar. How did your mom know that she had diabetes?

Well, she noticed that she had to get up a lot at night to go to the bathroom, and she never had to do that before. She was also very thirsty and felt tired a lot of the time. Sometimes her vision was blurry. So she went to the doctor to find out what was wrong. He told her she had diabetes.
My grandfather was a big man, you know, he weighed too much. Is that why he got diabetes?

The doctor said that anyone can get diabetes, even thin people like my mom and yours. But you are even more likely to get it if you are overweight. And you know it's in the genes. That means you and your mother have a greater chance of getting diabetes. And that's why it's so important to talk to your children about diabetes.

What can I do so I don't get it?

Well, keeping your weight down, regular exercise and eating healthy can help to prevent diabetes. It isn't easy. You might have to give up that chocolate candy you like so much! Or switch to sugar-free candy. And make sure you see the doctor at least once a year.
Oh, man, I don’t know if I can give up the candy! Maybe after I eat it, I can just pray to the Lord that my sugars don’t get too high!

It doesn’t work that way, Darlene! You got to take care of yourself! You got to set a good example for your kids and grands so they don’t get it. And you want to be around to enjoy your grands, right?

So, how does the doctor tell if I have high sugar?

He’ll probably ask you to do something called a fasting blood test. Sometimes you have to do the test a couple times to make sure the results are right. From this test, they can tell you if you have diabetes, or if you have an increased risk of getting diabetes.
Well, I’ve been feeling really good lately, so I don’t need to get tested right now.

Yes you do! Everyone should be tested. My mom’s doctor said that people can have diabetes for about 5 years before they feel any different. By that time, some damage can already be done to your eyes, kidneys, or nerves from the high sugars.

The sooner you know about your diabetes, the sooner you can change your life around. I got tested after I found out about my mom. I’m supposed to get my results tomorrow.
You know, I’m not sure my mother has been tested for diabetes. I think I’ll make an appointment for myself and my mother today.

Do you have any of the risk factors or symptoms below? If your answer is yes, you should talk to your doctor.

Risk factors:
- Family history of diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Overweight

Symptoms:
- Constant thirst
- Frequent need to urinate
- Extreme hunger
- Weight loss
- Blurred vision
- Tiredness; lack of energy
- Dry, itchy skin
- Numb hands or feet
- Wounds that heal slowly
- Frequent infections
We’re fine, Dr. Jackson. Darlene dropped me off while she takes my grandchildren to school. I am a little nervous about my bloodwork. How did it turn out?

Well, from the fasting blood test you got, it seems that you have diabetes. I know that this must be pretty upsetting to hear, but let’s talk it out and address your concerns.

You know, there are many ways that you can manage your diabetes.

A few weeks later, Darlene’s mother, Mrs. Walker sees the doctor to get her blood test results.
I was worried that I might have it. I have so many questions. I don’t know where to start! I eat a lot of starches, and that causes diabetes, right?

Well, not exactly. Let me tell you some things about diabetes. You can ask me any questions you have as we go along. Does that sound all right?

Yes, go ahead.

There are two types of diabetes, Type 1 and 2. You have Type 2. In Type 2 diabetes the insulin made by your body doesn’t work the way it is supposed to. Insulin helps your body move sugars into your cells to give you energy. This means that the sugar you get from the foods you eat, doesn’t get into your cells the way it should.
Foods that are starches, like bread and potatoes, break down into sugars during digestion. When you eat foods that have a lot of sugar in them, like starches, the body can’t use the sugar. When this happens the sugar stays in your bloodstream and makes you sick.

If you don’t control the amount of sugar in your blood you can get complications such as blindness and losing a limb, like your toes, foot or leg. Some people can manage their diabetes by watching their diet. Other people need to take pills and sometimes insulin.
I know I shouldn’t eat a lot of sweets anymore. But what can I eat to control my sugar? Do I need a special diet?

Good question. I want you to set up an appointment with a dietitian. The dietitian will talk to you about what food to eat, and set up a diet plan for you. This way you’ll know exactly what you should and shouldn’t have. Also, you should sign up for a diabetes education class.

Where do I find out about that?

There are diabetes classes offered at the hospital, and some programs are done in community sites, like churches. So you might want to call your hospital, church or senior center to see if there is a program near you.
One last thing I want you to do for me, Mrs. Walker.

What’s that?

I want you to quit smoking.

But, I have so much stress in my life, I think I have to smoke.

But now that you know you have diabetes, you should really try to stop because it makes your sugar problems worse!

Oh, I didn’t know that! Then maybe I’ll try to quit.
I know that it will take some time for all this new information to set in. So if you have any questions, please call my office and we’ll get back to you.

In the meantime, I want you to check your blood sugar every day. And, I want you to get a blood test called a hemoglobin A1c (he-mo-glo-bin A-1-c). Here is the lab request you’ll need.

Okay doctor, thanks for everything.

Hello Miss Alice. I want to talk to you about my sugar since I know that you have the same problem.

Sure, anything you want to know, you can ask me.

After her doctors visit, Mrs. Walker decides to go and talk to Anthony’s mother, Miss Alice, about diabetes.
I’m just so upset that I have to stick myself so many times a day. Just knowing that I have to do it the rest of my life is hard to take. I mean, that pinprick hurts! After doing it three times a day for a few weeks, I just broke down and cried!

I know it does, but it’s so important to keep a watch on your sugars. If you don’t do it, you won’t know what you can eat. It all depends on your sugar level.

Sometimes I just feel like cheating or not worrying about what I eat.

Just remember that if you don’t take care of yourself, you could end up in bad shape. How about if you had to get a foot amputated, you know cut off, because you didn’t watch your sugar? Or, how about if you became blind or went into one of those comas because of your sugars?
Yes, you’re right. I guess I’d rather stick myself.

You got to think to yourself, “Would I rather stick myself or go to the hospital?” I think you’d choose to stick yourself. What do you think?

Let’s get a cup of tea and keep talking.
You know, the next time you go to the doctor, you should ask about the blood tests they do on you. Did your doctor talk about your A1c?

She told me I should get an A1c test. But I was a little embarrassed to ask her what she was talking about.

Well, every three to six months, the doctor will ask you to get bloodwork done to check your A1c level. This test gives the doctor an idea of what your blood sugar levels were over the past couple of months.

It tells how well your diet, exercise and the medicine are working to control your sugar. You want to keep your A1c number under 7. That means that your sugars are under control.
Keeping your A1c number less than 7 can help to prevent blindness and amputations. What’s most important though, is that you ask questions about your sugar, even if you feel embarrassed.

Sometimes it helps to write down the questions you want to ask. The doctor is there to help you!

You’re right, next time I go to the doctor I’ll write down my questions. That way I can remember what to ask, even if I get nervous or embarrassed. And I’m going to write down my blood test results so I have my own record.
You also need to see the foot doctor and get your eyes checked at least once a year. By doing all of these things for yourself, you’ll make sure you’re around for a long time to come. Maybe you’ll even reach 89, like me! And, setting a good example will help your daughter and grands learn to make healthy choices, so they don’t get diabetes. You know what I’m sayin? Yes, I do. I’m going to keep on top of this diabetes. I have to, for myself, and my family.
To take good care of your diabetes you should:

- Check your blood sugar regularly
- Get a hemoglobin A1c test at least 2 times a year
- Have your vision (dilated eye exam) checked at least once a year
- Get a foot exam at least once a year
- See your doctor as he or she directs
- Get regular cholesterol tests
- Get a urine protein test
- Eat healthy
- Get a flu shot every year
- Check blood pressure
- Be active
- See a dentist at least once a year

In the space below write down three things you will do in the next few weeks to take care of your diabetes.

1. 
   
2. 
   
3. 
   