

Part 3 Prediabetes - What can I do about It?

Written by Nicole Winbush MD
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This is the final article in a continuing series about prediabetes. In the first article we discussed the diagnosis of prediabetes and how to know if you are at risk. Last week we discussed some common myths about prediabetes and in this final article we provide a list of 7 things you can do to reduce or reverse some of the metabolic changes associated with prediabetes.

Don't drink your calories. This may be a change that you have already made. If so, keep it up. But if not, let's take a look at the numbers. A typical bottle of soda or sweetened tea contains 180 - 220 calories. This does not seem like much, but over the course of the year, just drinking an average of 1 bottle per day translates into an additional twenty pounds of excess calories. Have you stopped the soda and tea and started drinking juice instead? The calorie count in juice and soda is about the same. You are best eating whole fruits or vegetables. The calories are fewer and you will get the benefits of more fiber and nutrients. Sugar free beverages can be a short term change, but there is evidence to suggest that these drinks may actually increase your appetite for more sweet and calorie-rich foods. What should you drink? Water - our bodies are made up of over 60% water. Unsweetened herbal and green tea are also good choices. If you have developed a taste for sweet beverages, it can take some time to break this habit. Ease your transition by adding water to juice and gradually increasing the proportion of water over time. Your taste buds adapt to dietary changes in a matter of weeks.

Learn about the Mediterranean Diet. There is no one perfect way of eating. However, there are certain foods that have been shown to be beneficial to controlling blood sugar and to help in weight loss and good weight maintenance. One pattern of eating that has shown benefit is called the Mediterranean diet. In brief, this is a way of eating in which you eat lots of vegetables, moderate amounts of whole grains, nuts and seeds. Meat in this diet most often comes in the form of poultry or fish and is only a couple of times per week. Olive oil is the main oil used in food preparation. If you are interested in learning more about the Mediterranean Diet and adaptations using foods that are more specific to different cultures including the African-American culture, resources can be found at:
<http://www.oldwayspt.org/resources/heritage-pyramids>

Don't skip meals. Skipping meals is too common in our society. However, if you are wanting to moderate your blood sugar, wanting to lose weight or both, consistency is key. Skipping meals is very stressful to the body. We have already discussed how increased stress hormones can increase blood sugar. In addition, if you frequently skips meals, your body thinks you are in a semi-starvation state that makes it harder to lose weight. Many people tell me that they do not feel like eating much in the morning. If so, start with a room temperature or warm beverage like a glass of tea or water. This can prepare the stomach for a small meal in the morning. In time, one's digestion will become accustomed to a morning meal.

Add more veggies. You really cannot eat too many brightly colored and green vegetables. People with higher vegetable intake have been observed to have lower chances of developing diabetes. Also, choose a variety of vegetables. People who eat a wide range of different veggies have also been shown to have lower rates of diabetes over time. Think about experimenting and trying a new vegetable each time you are at the store.

Gain muscle and lose fat. If you are working to lose weight, do not starve yourself to do it. Make

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sure that you are getting sufficient calories and protein to provide energy during the day. You want to lose fat not muscle. If you need assistance developing a balanced eating plan, see your healthcare provider for assistance. Also, make sure that regular physical activity is part of any weight loss plan. This will allow you to maintain and build muscle while losing weight.

Get a handle on stress. Stress levels affect our blood sugar. Find practices like consistent exercise, relaxation breathing or prayer that allow you to manage life stressors. If you are overwhelmed, please seek out assistance.

Do what you can to limit exposure to pesticides. Higher levels of pesticides in the blood have been found to be associated with increased diabetes risk regardless of weight. Eating organic vegetables and fruits can lessen your exposure to pesticides. However, it may not be possible for many of us to buy organic food due to increased cost and poor availability. If this is the case, make choices that are less harmful. There are foods that are known to be highest in pesticide levels, and these levels persist even after foods are washed and peeled. You can find a list of the "dirty dozen" here: <http://www.ewg.org/foodnews/summary/>. If possible, buy these foods organic or consider using alternatives from the "clean 15" list that are lower in pesticides. Always wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly (even if organic). If buying organic food is not possible, remember that the benefits of eating fresh vegetables and fruits still outweighs the risks of pesticide exposure.

This concludes the series on prediabetes. Remember, your biology is not your destiny. You have within your power the ability to make choices and take actions, that will improve your health, the health of your family and your community. You can start today!

Dr. Winbush is a family physician practicing at NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center. She has a strong interest in wellness and patient education to help individuals feel empowered to optimize their health and functioning. She wants to hear from you! To respond to this article, request topics for future articles and for additional resources visit www.functionwellmedicine.com or LIKE Function Well Medicine on Facebook.

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