

Preventing the Long Term Complications of Diabetes

A towering tree in the forest is only as strong as its root system. If that root system becomes damaged, every part of the tree, from the thickest branch to the tiniest leaf, is at risk of serious injury, even death.

When you have Type 2 Diabetes, high blood glucose damages the blood vessels everywhere in your body – both large and small.

And just like a tree with a damaged root system, over time you are at risk for serious health problems.

Your blood vessels carry oxygen and nutrients to every part of your body to keep you healthy. But when you have Type 2 Diabetes, your blood vessels also carry high levels of glucose, a form of sugar, high levels of blood fats like cholesterol and triglycerides, and high levels of insulin, all of which cause damage to the walls of the large and small blood vessels throughout your entire body.

Over a period of time, this damage to your blood vessels can cause very serious long term complications; health problems that may take a long time to develop, but can be very serious.

Large blood vessels carry blood to your heart, brain, legs, feet, arms and hands.

High blood glucose can contribute to the formation of plaque on the inside walls of large blood vessels. This process, known as atherosclerosis, causes the walls of the blood vessel to stiffen and reduces the amount of blood that can pass through.

Large blood vessel damage can lead to heart attack, stroke and poor circulation.

If you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol levels, together with diabetes, your risk of heart attack and stroke can increase even more.

High blood glucose levels can also damage the small blood vessels in your body leading to eye disease, kidney disease and nerve disease.

Called Neuropathy, nerve disease can cause pain, loss of feeling, and muscle weakness, usually in the hands, legs and feet.

Neuropathy can also affect how many of your organs work including your heart, and bladder. It can affect your digestive system and change how long food takes to digest, leading to diet changes. And it can affect how your sexual organs work which can lead to impotence.

The long-term complications of neuropathy and poor circulation in combination with a cut or sore, often leads to amputation of a toe, foot or leg.

But these things do not have to happen. We know without a doubt that you can reduce your risk of long term complications by keeping your blood glucose in a healthy range.

Together with your diabetes care team, take action to control your blood glucose levels. Make healthy food choices, get regular physical activity, take your medications if necessary and check your blood glucose.

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Even if you feel good, don't ignore the potential long-term health problems Type 2 diabetes can cause. Schedule regular healthcare appointments to make sure your glucose levels are not increasing your risk for the complications of diabetes.

Get your blood pressure and cholesterol checked on a regular basis. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on how to manage both.

"When I go back and forth to my doctor's he always said my pressure is good but he did put me on a pill for pressure."

If you are overweight, or carry extra weight around your stomach area, take steps to reach and maintain a healthy weight.

And if you smoke, quit. Talk to your diabetes care team about ways to quit smoking.

Each day, do all you can to take control of your blood glucose levels.

But if you notice any signs or symptoms of complications, call your healthcare provider right away so you can get the treatment you need as soon as possible.

Even though the long-term complications of diabetes can be serious, they don't have to happen. Make a commitment to take control of your blood glucose and overall health.

From the thickest branch, to the tiniest leaf, you can maintain good health for the long-term.

"I feel like I've been very lucky, very blessed that just some hard work and changing habits is turning my life around."