

Diabetes Awareness Month – DOH recommends healthy habits

Written by NM Dept. of Health
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You can ask any one out of thousands of New Mexicans, and they'll tell it to you straight: Living with type 2 diabetes is not easy.

The New Mexico Department of Health reports that diabetes affects more than 170,000 adults statewide. That's one 1 out of every 8 adults, and for some of them, it's an emotional roller coaster. The National Diabetes Education Program says it's common for people with diabetes to feel overwhelmed, sad, or angry when they have to make lifestyle changes to stay healthy.

Diabetes is a group of diseases marked by high levels of blood sugar due to defects in insulin production, insulin action, or both. Blood sugar is usually regulated in our bodies automatically thanks to insulin, a hormone produced by the pancreas. But when our body doesn't produce enough of it or the cells in our body resist the insulin, it may be a sign of diabetes.

The NMDOH Diabetes Prevention and Control Program reports you are at increased risk of diabetes if:

- You are overweight.
- You are physically inactive.
- A parent, brother or sister has diabetes.

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- You are Hispanic/Latino, Native American, Asian American, African American or Pacific Islander.
- You had a baby weighing more than 9 pounds or had gestational diabetes.
- You have high blood pressure.
- You have low HDL (good cholesterol).
- You have high triglycerides.
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Warning signs include frequent trips to the bathroom, unquenchable thirst, losing weight without trying, weakness or fatigue, tingling or numbness in your hands, legs or feet and more. Symptoms can also include blurred vision, itchy or dry skin, cuts and bruises that take a long time to heal.

Diabetes may be managed without medication with lifestyle changes that include diet and exercise. The challenge for some is finding ways to move more each day and staying active over time, especially if they don't have access to healthy foods and safe opportunities for physical activity. Just remember that while making the healthy choice isn't always easy, it is worth it.

The NDEP recommends that if you are living with diabetes or prediabetes choose a goal that's important to you and that you believe you can do. Make a list of the small steps you will take to reach that goal. For example, if your goal is to eat fewer calories, you might skip second helpings at dinner, and drink water instead of soda or fruit juice at lunch.

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Consider also making an appointment with a dietitian to talk about other ways to cut back on calories during the day. Reach out to friends, co-workers, or family for support and ideas about how to cope with the stress in your life. Learning ways to deal with stress and your emotions is a key step in reaching your goals.

Diabetes is serious. Taking control of diabetes is more complicated than simply popping a pill. It involves the careful balancing act of nutrition, exercise and, sometimes, medication. That's why you're better off knowing your risks and taking action to prevent diabetes. To assess your risk, go to the [Type 2 Diabetes Risk Test](#).

Losing weight, exercising, managing your blood pressure and cholesterol, and if you smoke, giving up the habit, can help you prevent or delay not just diabetes, but many other chronic conditions. If you find you are at risk for diabetes, bring the risk assessment to your health care provider to discuss your options. A next step may be to have a blood test to see if you have pre-diabetes. If you do, don't delay! Act today.