

Taking Control of Prediabetes and Your Health

Hulya Kaymaz, M.D.

More people than ever are now on their way to developing diabetes. You need to take control. Make sure you get checked for prediabetes.

What is prediabetes?

What makes your chance of developing diabetes higher?

When and how should you be tested?

How do you prevent prediabetes from turning into diabetes?

In this summary, I would like to answer these questions.

What is prediabetes?

This is a condition where blood sugar levels during fasting are above normal but not at the level indicating actual diabetes. The high end of normal has recently been decreased to 100 from 110. Therefore, now there are even more people who are at risk for diabetes. Prediabetes tells you that you have a good chance of developing diabetes within the next 10 years unless you take measures to turn yourself around. Diabetes is a serious disease that can cause serious heart disease and damage to kidneys, nerves, eyes, and many other parts of the body.

Prediabetes is quite prevalent, especially in those above the age of 45. Nearly 20 million Americans (22 percent of adults over 20) have prediabetes. A combination of obesity, lack of activity, and genetic tendency is responsible.

What are the risk factors?

- An age of 45 years or older
- Excess weight: 20 percent or more over your ideal body weight
- Family history: Type 2 diabetes or heart disease in the family
- High blood pressure
- Abnormal cholesterol levels: HDL cholesterol less than 40 in men and 50 in women or triglycerides more than 150 mg/dL
- History of gestational diabetes (high blood sugars during pregnancy)
- Weight carried around the belly: a waist measurement of more than 40 inches for men and more than 35 inches for women
- Ethnic background: high risk groups are African Americans, Latinos, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans

In fact, a combination of low HDL levels, a family history of diabetes and heart disease, waistline obesity, high blood pressure, and higher than normal blood sugar levels makes up the condition known as metabolic syndrome. People who have metabolic syndrome gradually lose their sensitivity to insulin, which is the major blood sugar regulating hormone. This keeps the levels of circulating sugar high by not allowing cells to use it.

When should you get tested?

You may be feeling fine, without any symptoms to warn you until you have full-blown diabetes. That is why it is important to get tested.

I test my patients yearly for these indicators after age 40, or earlier if you have higher risk factors. Thus, if you are over 40 or have some of the above risk factors, I recommend coming in for yearly physical exams to discuss options. Your risk is measured by the following tests as well as by your weight:

- Fasting blood sugar levels above 100mg/dL
- Triglycerides more than 150 mg/dL
- HDL cholesterol less than 40 for men and 45 for women
- Blood pressure above 130/85 mm Hg

How do you fight prediabetes?

Your best weapons are diet and exercise. And preventing diabetes could be a lifesaver.

There is good evidence that diet and exercise will decrease your risk substantially. In one study done with 3,000 people, patients who started exercising 30 minutes a day and lost 5 to 7 percent of their body weight decreased their chance of developing diabetes by 58 percent. Weight reduction is important because weight loss increases the body's sensitivity to insulin and thereby the utilization of sugar. Another study found that lifestyle changes were twice as effective as taking Metformin (the medicine that is used for diabetes prevention).

Lifestyle changes will not happen overnight. There will be ups and downs. You need to be patient and willing to do it in steps. Do not get discouraged. If you are a sedentary person, you know you will not be able to walk three miles the first day. Every time you go for a walk, you need to do a little bit more, go a little bit farther, than you did the last time.

Despite numerous diet regimens and plans, the formula for losing weight could be as simple as calories in, calories out. That is to say that how much you eat matters as much as what you eat. Keeping logs of what food you eat, how much you exercise, and how much you weigh will help you keep track of your progress.

Let's have a goal: losing one pound a week. One pound is roughly 3,500 calories. Half an hour of brisk walking, biking, or any other aerobic exercise daily, along with getting rid of 250 calories a day (such as a bag of chips or a candy bar), is one way to achieve this goal.

The risk of developing diabetes is more prevalent than ever, but you can minimize it by taking control of your health with regular exercise and a good diet.

Let's take control and thrive.