Diabetes management

This month’s series is a partnership of the New Pittsburgh Courier, Community PART- ners (a core service of the University of Pittsburgh’s Clinical and Translational Sci- ence Institute—CTSI), the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh and the UPMC Center for Engagement and Inclusion. All articles can be accessed online at the New Pitts- burgh Courier website. These pages will provide you with valuable information on health topics that may affect you, your fam- ily and friends and connect you to local health initiatives and resources.

This month, the “Take Charge of Your Health Today” page focuses on the impor- tance of eating healthy, staying active and risk planning—three important goals for good diabetes management for people living with diabetes. Marcus A. Poindexter, LSW, HS, and Esther L. Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League, discussed this important topic.

MAP: Good morning, Ms. Bush. It’s such a pleasure to sit down with you again to dis- cuss the importance of good diabetic man- agement, which is a process to restore the normal functions of the metabolism (break- down of the food we eat). Thanks to better treatment, people with diabetes are now liv- ing longer and have a better quality of life than ever before. This is because of excel- lent self-care behaviors, such as eating healthy, staying active and risk planning (coping) to maintain the goal of good dia- betic management. For people living with di- abetes, however, making healthy choices can be extremely difficult. What suggestions can you provide to keep our people and their loved ones healthy?

EB: Marcus, staying healthy is critical for good diabetes management. Something that I have always encouraged everyone to do is to take your medications exactly as directed. Not taking your medications cor- rectly can lower the level of glucose in your blood and cause the insulin in your body to go up. This can be extremely dangerous and can result in needing immediate medical atten- tion. I would also encourage people to talk to their doctor about their medications if they are causing you to feel sick. He or she may be able to help you deal with the side effects so that you can feel better. Don’t just stop taking your medications. That can be danger- ous.

MAP: What is an excellent point, Ms. Bush. Eating right is also an important part of con- trolling your diabetes, too. Eating smaller portions, avoiding fried and fast foods, like fried foods, whole milk and dairy products, can help control your diabetes. However, if you are anything like me, cutting down on eating sweets can be detrimental to my mental health and well-being of others. What can you offer to those who find themselves in a similar plight?

EB: Marcus, I think we all can relate to your situation. Coping with some of my food combinations hasley seen a couple of cookies every day or just a few times a week. Eating right doesn’t necessarily mean that you have to do away with the foods you enjoy. It just simply means that you have to eat fewer of these high-in-sugar foods at one time. Developing a meal plan and making a menu can cut down on overeating the high-fat foods. I would also suggest meeting with other dia- betics and talking with them about how they handle stress. Ignoring stress is impossible. However, developing a support group of people who can help you during hard times may help in making stress more manage- able.

MAP: I agree, Ms. Bush. I know this topic is one that can be difficult to discuss, but it’s important to figure out how we can keep maintain good diabetes management for our community. Just one more thing, everyone who is continued to read these pages each month. These pages are adapted from content in- formed about diabetes topics important to our communities.

MS: Questions or comments about the information on this page, e-mail Partners@uphs.pitt.edu.

African Americans have 50 percent higher risk of developing diabetes

Are you one of the millions of Americans who has diabetes or knows someone who does? According to a 2014 report from the U.S. Cen- ters for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 29 million Americans have dia- betes. Of these, 12.6 million are African Americans. More than one in three adults has higher-than- normal blood sugar levels. Researchers are working hard to understand why so many people have diabetes and what can be done to prevent it.

Diabetes is a disease marked by too-high blood glucose (sugar) levels. The food we eat turns into sugar. Our bodies use that sugar for energy. The pancreas produces a for- mer called insulin. Insulin triggers glucose from cells in our bodies. Diabetes is caused when the body either does not make enough insulin or when the body can’t use the insulin that is made. Not having enough insulin causes glucose to build up in the blood. This buildup can lead to health problems. The health risks associated with diabetes can be serious. They include heart disease, blindness, kidney fail- ure, and problems with the nerves, feet and legs. Diabetes is a disease that never goes away. It can be controlled but can’t necessarily mean that you have to do away with the foods you enjoy. It just simply means that you have to eat fewer of these high-in-sugar foods at one time. Developing a meal plan and making a menu can cut down on overeating the high-fat foods. I would also suggest meeting with other dia- betics and talking with them about how they handle stress. Ignoring stress is impossible. However, developing a support group of people who can help you during hard times may help in making stress more manage- able.

Dr. Zijovic encourages people to eat a variety of foods as well as exercise—both of which can help control blood sugar. "A diabetes diagnosis is overwhelming," she says. "People with diabetes and their families should know that they are not alone; they can get help. It helps to know the diabetes ABCs:

1. AIC (HbA1c) —Diabetes can be diag- nosed if your hemoglobin A1c is above a certain percentage of your hemoglobin—a protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen. The normal range is usually considered to be 5.7% to 6.5%.

2. Blood pressure—A lower blood pres- sure helps reduce the risk of heart disease.

3. Cholesterol—It is important to keep your cholesterol levels at a healthy level. If you have diabetes, your provider may suggest cutting down on any foods high in fats, such as fried foods, and switching to more healthy fats and oils.

As with any disease, Drs. Zijovic and Or- chard stress the importance of following good diabetic management. People may become worried about diabetes or getting the treatment that’s best for them.

Researchers think that type 1 diabetes may be triggered by something that goes wrong in the body’s autoimmune system (the area of the body where immune cells attack normal cells). Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body cannot use insulin properly. In the past, type 2 diabetes was usually diagnosed in people in their 50s and up. Now, healthcare providers are find- ing younger people being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.

Janice Zijovic, RPH, MPh, PhD, associate professor of epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health, says that a lot of good diabetes research has been done and is ongoing. She and other researchers are working to get that information into the hands of health care providers and patients for better dia- betes management. Dr. Zijovic has focused on recent research on primary care office care in the area. She found that quicker and more intense diabetes treatment can be effective in controlling the disease.

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