



Executive Chef Paul Marks shares recipes and cooking tips with members.

DIABETES: HOW TO COPE

Several years ago, I wrote a series of columns in direct response to the news that several people close to me were diagnosed with pre-diabetes and Type 2 diabetes.

Because diabetes continues to affect more people in our community every day, I've decided to present edited versions of the original columns over the next few months.

When my friends were diagnosed, both of them asked me to help them with lifestyle changes to try and control their diabetes. I am not a licensed dietician, nor do I have a medical background, but this is what I have learned and it may be helpful for you. Most references in this article are for Type 2 diabetes or people who are pre-diabetic.

Diabetes is a disease where your body does not or cannot produce insulin, which converts food into energy. The cause of diabetes is unknown but hereditary and lifestyle are strong contributing factors. People that have a pear-shaped body seem to be more prone to the disease.

There are two types of diabetes: Type 1, in which the body does not produce insulin at all, is found most often in young children and young adults. Type 2, in which the body does not properly respond to the insulin produced, is found in adults, usually 45 and older. Other Type 2 factors include being overweight and not exercising, having low HDL ("good") cholesterol and high triglycerides, and/or having a family history of diabetes.

In diabetes there is too much glucose in the blood—a type of sugar that your body's cells use for fuel. When you eat, your body turns the food into glucose. In a healthy person, a hormone called insulin helps the glucose enter the cells, thus fueling the body. In Type

2 diabetes the body either does not make insulin or the cells ignore the insulin.

When glucose builds up in the blood instead of going into the cells, it causes two problems. First, your cells may become starved for energy. Second, over time high glucose levels may hurt your eyes, kidneys, nerves and heart; cause blurred vision, dry skin and tingling or neuropathy in the hands and feet; and may make infections harder to heal. If the diabetes is not treated, very serious health problems can arise, including heart disease, blindness, stroke and nerve damage.

What I have learned is that treatment and prevention go hand-in-hand with this disease. One without the other will not help an individual in the long term.

Type 1 is controlled with insulin shots, diet and regular exercise. Type 2 is combated first by weight loss if you are overweight, then diet and exercise. Insulin shots or pills are the next step if the lifestyle change alone does not help. If you have a family history of diabetes you can reduce your risk of getting diabetes by maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Finding out that you have diabetes can be a very scary thing. It can alter how your life is lived, but you shouldn't panic or become depressed. The first thing you should remember if you are diagnosed, in my opinion, is not to obsess that you now have a disease. Instead, turn that energy into eating right and exercising.

Is diabetes curable? From what I have read and the questions that I have asked, the answer to that would be no, it is not curable but it can be manageable, allowing you to live life relatively normally. With good treatment your glucose levels can return to normal ranges, but this does not mean that you are cured. What it does mean is that your treatment plan is working, and that you are taking good care of yourself and managing your lifestyle.



Making lifestyle changes, such as eating more fresh produce, can help stave off or manage diabetes.

Since exercise is one of the primary managing factors for Type 2 diabetes, get advice from your doctor about the type of exercise you are doing. If you are not exercising now, begin with five minutes of walking a day, as this at least gets you started.

If you are carrying a few extra pounds, get that weight off. But do this by changing your eating habits to making healthy food choices, not just dieting. Most people who diet just gain the weight back once they stop the diet. A healthy eating plan that avoids fatty foods and sugar is a must. As you eat healthier, you will find that your body feels better, you have more energy and you'll also feel more satisfied by what you are eating.

One recommendation I have is to make an appointment with a dietician. Let that individual know what you are going through and they can guide you into a healthier diet and exercise plan that will work for you. A dietician can steer you to the right way of eating, not toward starving yourself or depriving yourself totally of your favorite foods.