

Diabetes & Seniors

Half of all diabetes occurs in people older than 55 and nearly 20 percent of Americans 65 and older, a total of seven million people, battle daily to keep the disease under control.

Diabetes is an insidious disease that runs rampant among the senior population. Sixty-five percent of all people with diabetes will die of heart disease or stroke, and they are likely to die younger than those without the disease.

It is the leading cause of blindness in adults, and those seniors with diabetes are twice as likely to be hospitalized for kidney infections. About 60 to 70 percent of those with diabetes have some forms of diabetic nerve damage, which can lead to amputations of the lower extremities.

About NuevaCare

NuevaCare provides non-medical home care services to seniors who need assistance with their activities of daily living.

Our services include:

- Medication reminders
- Respite care
- Grocery shopping
- Errands & household duties
- Transportation
- Supervise walking and fall prevention
- Light housekeeping
- Laundry/ironing & changing bed linens
- Socialization & companionship
- Alzheimer's/Dementia support
- Ambulation assistance
- Incontinence support
- Bathing & grooming supervision
- Meal planning & preparation
- Hygiene assistance
- Dressing assistance

Understanding Diabetes

Characterized by hyperglycemia (excess blood sugar) and insulin resistance (which prevents glucose from entering the cells and, instead, builds it up in the blood), diabetes remains largely asymptomatic for many years. This is why many overlook the most common initial symptoms -- increased thirst and frequent urination, which is the result of excess glucose in the bloodstream sucking water from tissues. This forces the body to take in more liquids and, as a result, excrete more fluid.

Diabetes education becomes important because many of those at risk either misunderstand or ignore the disease and take action only when the situation becomes acute. This can result in one or more of the debilitating health problems of untreated diabetes -- cardiovascular disease, loss of vision, nerve damage, or



the loss of a toe or limb.

Early diagnosis is critical. Once the disease has progressed, it often results in more obvious symptoms like:

- Feeling rundown and lethargic, where your body runs out of energy and feels like a car without any gas;
- Weight loss or weight gain, as you may eat more or try to make up for the lost fluids, or you may lose weight because your muscles don't get enough glucose;
- Blurred vision, as excess levels of sugar pull fluid from the lenses of your eyes;
- Sores or wounds that heal slowly or frequent urinary tract infections;
- Numbness, tingling or a burning sensation in your arms and legs due to decreased circulation that can cause nerve damage;
- Gum disease where gums become red and inflamed, putting your teeth at risk.

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Fighting Back

Seniors diagnosed with diabetes can fight back -- but it often means a lifestyle change.

The single most effective treatment, as well as the best prevention, is gradual and permanent weight loss. This involves decreasing your caloric intake and, at the same time, increasing your level of exertion. Simply put, this means eating less and exercising more.

Easier said than done? Absolutely. Yet, by starting slowly, you can make small and steady changes that will make a difference. Start out by cutting out dessert and avoiding second portions. Increase your intake of vegetables, fruit, and whole grains that are high in complex carbohydrates and decrease the amount of red meat and sugars you eat. Avoid alcoholic beverages. Start walking – if the weather is bad, do it on a treadmill or buy an exercise bike or consider joining a club or pool. Working with a certified fitness trainer who has

experience in working with your age group is a good way to get started.

If diet and exercise are insufficient, drug options can help manage the diabetes – although they can be expensive and can cause side effects.

Managing Your Condition

As a diabetic, you need to work closely with your doctor to manage your condition. This includes:

- Having regular blood tests to make sure your diabetes is under control;
- Having your eyes checked regularly to keep track of diabetic retinopathy that causes deterioration in the blood vessels of the retina;
- Monitoring your weight and blood pressure and making changes if necessary;
- Checking the health of your feet for any signs of foot ulcers or infections and discussing proper footwear if necessary;
- Monitoring your levels of cholesterol and triglycerides (the types of fat found in the bloodstream);
- Conducting regular urine tests to look for any kidney problems;
- Getting vaccinated against influenza and pneumonia as a precaution against additional infection;
- Not smoking;
- Managing your level of stress.

Seniors with diabetes have a tough road ahead. But you can manage the disease effectively by educating yourself on what you can and can't do, and making a lifelong commitment to changing your lifestyle.