Diabetes Risk

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Living Well With Diabetes During Menopause

Menopause brings a host of lifestyle changes, and for many women a higher risk of diabetes is one of the most worrisome. In some cases, type 2 diabetes has been lurking in the background for a while, and the hormone fluctuations of menopause simply bring the condition to light. In other cases, an array of new risk factors spark the blood sugar imbalance that is the hallmark of diabetes. In either situation, menopause and diabetes can be a volatile combination.

Regardless of how diabetes hits, it's crucial that you recognize the risks and get on track with the right treatment plan as quickly as possible. The good news is, there are plenty of ways to reduce your risk of complications, and manage both disorders without too much stress or expense.

The Connection between Menopause and Diabetes

The tendency to gain weight and decrease physical activity at the onset of menopause certainly raises diabetes risk, but there's a genetic factor at play, too. Hispanic women are three to five times more likely to develop diabetes than other cultures, and medical history can play a big role in your particular risk level. In the end, experts suspect that diabetes risk does go up after menopause, but it may be due to aging and hormonal disposition as much as the physical changes you experience during the transition.

One particularly tricky challenge is telling menopause symptoms and diabetes symptoms apart. Dizziness, mood swings, irritability and general unease are common complaints in both cases, and they can happen so frequently that you may be tempted to simply struggle through rather than uncover the source of your distress. This can be a recipe for disaster, since interactions between the two conditions can lead to a variety of complications.

How Menopause Symptoms Interfere with Diabetes

Diabetes and menopause have separate sets of discomforts, but they can also interfere with each other in some significant ways:

- **Blood sugar fluctuations**. Managing blood sugar levels is a top priority for diabetes sufferers, but volatile hormones in menopause make the task even more difficult. As estrogen and progesterone spike and fall, they tend to disrupt blood sugar balance.

- **Thinning bones**. With a permanent drop in estrogen, menopause leaves you more vulnerable to thinning bones and osteoporosis. Since diabetes also leaves you prone to bone and joint problems, you're at even greater risk of injury and bone damage.
- **Sleep issues**. Night sweats, anxiety and insomnia commonly interfere with sleep during menopause, but the effects are more dangerous when diabetes is involved. Sleep is your opportunity to restore hormonal balance, energy levels, and metabolic health, so poor sleep quality can wreak havoc on your blood sugar

levels.

- **Weight gain**. Many menopausal women struggle with weight gain as hormones shift, spike and dwindle, and that can lead to a host of other health concerns. Since diabetes already increases your risk of heart disease, extra weight can quickly escalate your chances of developing a cardiovascular condition. Also, women with diabetes are at a higher risk of developing atherosclerosis (hardening of the artery walls) once they enter menopause, which means their risk of heart attack and stroke also increases.

Frequent infections are another problem when menopause and diabetes mix, mostly due to hormonally-induced changes to the vaginal tissue and urinary tract. Add to this the long list of discomforts and worries that diabetes brings to menopause (or vice versa), and you may be eager to start hormone replacement therapy in an effort to reduce the damage. But before you take a drastic step, consider how powerful some small adjustments can be in your struggle for emotional and physical balance.

Next page: countering complications.

Countering Complications

There are three vital aspects to managing your health and vitality when you live with diabetes during menopause: protection, management, and improvement. Staying strong and disease-free will take some care and attention, but rest assured that you have all the tools you need to keep control of your well-being.

- **Protect your body**. Good management begins with good planning. Ideally, you'll want to talk with your doctor as soon as you begin to notice menopausal symptoms, so you know what changes to expect and how to deal with them. Get a good handle on important measurements, like your blood pressure, BMI, blood lipid level and any genetic factors that could affect your heart disease risk.Don't forget about your bone health, since the majority of bone loss occurs within the first couple of years after the onset of menopause, and diabetes accelerates the process. Begin with a bone density scan, and consider adding calcium and vitamin D supplements at the outset to stay one step ahead of bone degeneration.
- **Monitor your health**. When you live with diabetes, you get used to checking various measurements frequently. But once you enter menopause, it's important that you look beyond blood sugar, insulin level and general weight gain in order to stay on a healthy track.Since sleep is such a concern when it comes to metabolic and hormonal health, take a closer look at what might be messing with your shut eye. Check your blood glucose levels in the early hours of the morning to determine whether they are to blame for your restless night, or if your night sweats are waking you up. Keep a diary to track weight gain and emotional swings, and get in the habit of checking in with your doctor to ensure your medication dosages are appropriate for your symptoms.

- **Make helpful changes**. When it comes to fitness, regular cardiovascular activity is helpful, but resistance training is equally important. Wight bearing exercise helps to build and maintain bone density and range of motion, so incorporate some light weightlifting or bodyweight resistance a few days each week, and consider increasing your daily walk to a jog – the high impact movement is fantastic for both bones and muscles.One of the very best changes you can make during menopause is shifting your focus to yourself. It's not a question of choosing yourself over the people you love, but rather favoring your health and comfort over the obligations and patterns that work against your well-being. Living with diabetes during menopause is a team effort, and your doctors have an important role to play, but it's the little decisions you make each day that have the greatest impact on your health and longevity.