Delaying Diabetes

Diet and exercise can delay diabetes for at least a decade, and those lifestyle changes work better than a popular drug.

In the late 1990s, the Diabetes Prevention Program randomly assigned, to one of three groups, roughly 3,200 people who were at risk for diabetes because they were overweight or obese and had fasting blood sugar levels that were elevated (at least 95 mg/dL) but not high enough to warrant a diagnosis of diabetes (126 mg/dL or higher).

Those assigned to the intensive lifestyle group were encouraged to lose at least 7 percent of their body weight and to exercise for at least 2 1/2 hours a week. The drug group was given the oral diabetes drug metformin (850 milligrams twice a day), and the placebo group was given lookalike but inactive pills.

In 2001, the researchers halted the study one year earlier than planned because the results were so clear: The risk of diabetes was 58 percent lower in the intensive lifestyle group than in the placebo group. Metformin cut the risk by 31 percent versus the placebo.

In a follow-up study, the researchers invited the people from all three of the original groups to attend coaching sessions on intensive lifestyle changes every three months. During the next six years, the people from the original intensive lifestyle group maintained their lower risk of diabetes, while the risk of people from the original drug and placebo groups declined.

But since the people in the original lifestyle group had a head start, their 10-year risk of diabetes was 34 percent lower than the risk of those in the original placebo group. The metformin group's risk was 18 percent lower than the original placebo group's.

What to do: How much proof do you need? Lose that excess weight and get moving.

Salt’s Damage

Too much salt raises blood pressure, which raises the risk of stroke and heart disease.

In a meta-analysis, Italian and British researchers pooled 13 studies on a total of 170,000 people.

They found that cutting sodium by 2,000 milligrams a day could lead to 23 percent fewer strokes and 17 percent less cardiovascular disease. That would save 1.25 million deaths due to stroke and nearly 3 million deaths from cardiovascular disease worldwide each year.

The average American consumes around 4,000 mg of sodium a day.

What to do: Avoid excess salt. Check Nutrition Facts panels on packages to find lower-sodium foods. Eat more fresh foods prepared from scratch.

Selenium & Cholesterol

Earlier studies suggested that taking extra selenium may raise the risk of diabetes and non-melanoma skin cancer. If new findings are borne out, extra selenium may also raise LDL (“bad”) cholesterol.

British scientists measured selenium and cholesterol in the blood of roughly 1,000 men and women aged 19 to 64 who participated in the 2000-2001 UK National Diet and Nutrition Survey.

Those with the highest selenium levels also had the highest levels of LDL cholesterol.

What to do: Don’t take selenium supplements or daily multivitamins that contain more than 55 micrograms (mcg) of selenium. That’s the government’s Recommended Dietary Allowance.

Although this study isn’t proof that too much selenium raises cholesterol, there’s no good reason to take more of the trace element than you might get naturally from your food.

CHOLESTEROL & THE PROSTATE

A lower cholesterol level may protect your prostate as well as your heart.

Researchers studied roughly 5,500 healthy men aged 55 or older who had been assigned to take a placebo for seven years in the Prostate Cancer Prevention Trial.

Men who entered the study with total cholesterol under 200 were 60 percent less likely to be diagnosed with the most damaging kinds of prostate tumors—those with Gleason scores of 8 to 10—than men who entered the study with higher cholesterol.

Other studies have found a lower risk of advanced prostate cancer in men who take cholesterol-lowering statin drugs.

What to do: It’s too early to know whether a cholesterol-lowering diet or statin drugs can protect the prostate. But it’s still worth eating a diet that lowers LDL (“bad”) cholesterol (which should also lower total cholesterol). At worst, it will only protect your heart.


References:


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