

How to control your blood sugar to prevent diabetes

By Lucas Teynor

Diabetes is a serious chronic disease that is an epidemic nationwide. In Montana, about 5,300 adults will be diagnosed with diabetes each year, according to the American Diabetes Association.

The good news is that making small changes can prevent diabetes. By making smart food choices, staying active, monitoring blood sugar and maintaining a healthy weight, people can take control of their health and reduce their risk of developing diabetes.

What is diabetes?

Blood sugar, or glucose, is the main source of energy for your body and comes from the food you eat. Diabetes is a condition where the body struggles to manage blood sugar, and over time high blood sugar can interfere with the production or use of insulin, a hormone that helps regulate sugar levels. When blood sugar becomes too high, the body compensates by reducing insulin receptors. This makes it harder for insulin to remove sugar from the bloodstream. As a result, the body becomes less sensitive to insulin, and excess sugar is stored as fat. This fat can build up in blood vessels, restricting blood flow and causing damage, which can lead to serious health issues like heart disease, stroke, kidney damage and nerve problems.

Here are a few things you can do to make healthy changes and prevent diabetes:

- **Get moving:** Physical activity is a powerful tool for blood sugar management. The American Diabetes Association recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week, like walking, swimming or cycling. Strength training at least three times a week can also help improve how the body uses insulin.
- **Monitor your blood sugar:** Seeing your health care provider for an annual visit can help identify if your blood sugar has been elevated. They can provide education, guidance and support to help keep it in check.
- **Maintain a healthy weight:** Studies show that losing just 5-10% of body weight can improve insulin sensitivity and reduce the risk of developing diabetes. Bonus - this will also help your blood pressure.
- **Eat smart:** Eating the right foods can help prevent sudden spikes in blood sugar. Low-glycemic foods like whole grains and vegetables can also prevent sugar spikes. Increasing fiber intake from fruits, beans, and whole grains can slow sugar absorption. Eating healthy fats like olive oil and nuts improve insulin sensitivity. Lastly, eating smaller, frequent meals maintains stable blood sugar levels.

- **Cut back on sugar and processed foods:** Refined carbohydrates, like white bread, pastries and sugary drinks will cause rapid blood sugar spikes.
- **Stay hydrated:** Drinking plenty of water helps flush out excess sugar through urine and keeps blood sugar levels balanced.
- **Limit alcohol and sodium:** Too much alcohol and salt can negatively impact blood sugar and overall health. Try to keep sodium intake below 2,300 mg per day and avoid alcohol, and if you do drink, do it in moderation.
- **Personalized nutrition:** Everyone has individualized nutrition needs. Working with a health care professional like a dietician can help create a personalized eating plan tailored to you, ensuring the best blood sugar control.
- **Quit tobacco:** Smoking increases your chance of having type 2 diabetes. It reduces the amount of oxygen that reaches your organs, causing high blood pressure and many other health problems.

It may seem overwhelming, but making small changes today can lead to a healthier future.

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