Are There Any Positives to Having Diabetes?

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Looking on the Bright Side: Positives of Diabetes

Most people can agree that when they were first diagnosed with diabetes their overwhelming feelings were not positive.

Let’s face it — the prospect of being at a greater risk for a number of life-changing or even life-threatening conditions is not one which generally fills the newly-diagnosed with joy. But if you take time to push away your initial panic, you may realize it’s not all bad news and what you have been given is an opportunity to make some very positive changes to your life.

Changes in Nutrition and Weight

It might be that you have gotten used to being a typical diabetes “apple” shape (one of the most dangerous body types to be as fat gathers around your internal organs). With help from your doctor, specialist nurses and nutritionists, this may be the time you finally manage to get the hang of healthy eating, which in turn may bring you the silhouette you’ve always wanted.

Of course, healthy eating is not all about weight loss (or weight gain if pre-diagnosis diabetes left you underweight). A good diet for diabetes — and in fact for everyone — is balanced, with plenty of fruit and vegetables.

When craving food or drinks you know could raise blood glucose to dangerous levels, it might help your willpower to remember good blood glucose control can lower the risk of people with type 1 diabetes of dying from a heart attack, stroke or cardiovascular disease by up to 57 percent.

Improving Health and Kicking Habits

People with type 2 diabetes are also at higher risk of cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, kidney, eye and nerve problems. The good news is that working at controlling your condition can really make a difference for your outlook. Generally, every percentage point drop in HbA1c tests equates to a 40 percent reduction in risk of these associated conditions.

Making the most of improving your lifestyle after a diabetes diagnosis could also mean finally kicking that smoking habit, which will lower risk of stroke and/or a heart attack even further.

If better health is not incentive enough to quit, think of the other benefits: fresher breath, whiter teeth, a better-smelling home and clothes, and lots of extra cash. Talk to your healthcare provider about getting support while giving up.

Energy and Exercise

Undiagnosed or poorly managed diabetes can leave you feeling exhausted. Sorting out any medication required and sticking to the diet your nutritionist recommends to manage diabetes might see you with more of a spring in your step as energy levels rise.

Getting regular exercise can also be very beneficial in the management of blood glucose. Being active increases insulin sensitivity so your body is better able to use insulin to take up glucose during and after exercise. Muscle contractions also encourage cells to take glucose and use it for energy, even if there is little or no insulin available.

Obviously, not everyone is able to hit the gym or take up marathon running, so speak to your healthcare team about what, and how much, exercise is appropriate for you, and review regularly as your health and fitness improves.

It might even improve your social life if you attend an organized class or join a gym or sports team. You might make new friends — why not agree to keep each other motivated? You could set up a Facebook group or create a group on a chat app to stay in touch between meetings. You might even find you enjoy exercise!

If money is an issue or you don't fancy exercising alone, why not ask a friend or neighbor if they would like to join you in a walk, a class or even a run?

Getting fitter, especially if your chosen activity is carried out outdoors, can lift the mood. If you choose a relaxing activity that also improves fitness, like tai chi or yoga, you could find you are better able to deal with stress or anxiety.

Stress can raise blood sugars so finding a way to keep fit and happy could make a real difference to your life and health.

Other Improvements

Getting blood glucose under control through diet, fitness or medication (or any combination of these) might also result in you getting a better night's sleep.

One of the most common side effects of poorly controlled blood glucose is a frequent urge to urinate — often throughout the night. Another symptom is increased thirst — put these two symptoms together and you have a perfect storm situation where you might find you are constantly drinking and needing to urinate.

Getting levels back to normal might mean you can finally sleep through the whole night without any bathroom breaks in the early hours of the morning!

So don't despair if you have diabetes. With the right mindset you can turn that frown upside down and make your condition the reason to re-evaluate life choices and get rid of anything negative in your lifestyle.