Understand Your Risk for Diabetes Comorbidities

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Diabetes Comorbidities and Concerns They Pose

If you suffer from diabetes, you are at risk for other health problems. Many of the issues you potentially face are due to damages to your blood vessels from diabetes. Experts believe that injuries to your blood vessels and bodily tissues arise from a wide array of mechanisms. Similar changes within your body create different health issues, depending upon which organs are involved.

Why Does Having Diabetes Make Me More Susceptible to Other Illnesses?

Some mechanisms involved are highly complex, while others are very simple. If you have high levels of blood glucose, your bodily fluids are stickier than if you maintain normal blood sugar levels. Stickiness slows down the flow of fluids; it is easier for blood vessels to clog up when blood is made stickier by the presence of excess sugar.

You are also prone to having elevated levels of unhealthy LDL cholesterol, which is sticky. Cholesterol builds up, creates inflammation and narrows blood vessels. Whenever blood flow is impaired, inflammation and injury to tissues arise.

Blood clotting problems and excess insulin production contribute to the increased likelihood of you developing concurrent illnesses, known as comorbidities.

Insulin resistance is an autoimmune response; when an autoimmune response occurs your entire body experiences general inflammation, often at a subtle level you are not aware of. Chronic inflammation is responsible for most of the diseases humans contract.

Cardiovascular Disease Risks

Because of the stress and physiological changes diabetes puts on your heart and blood vessels, you have an elevated risk of developing cardiac and circulation problems. These include peripheral vascular disease, coronary artery disease, and cerebrovascular disease.

Peripheral Vascular Disease

A peripheral vascular disease can result in edema, or swelling, of your legs. Your circulation to your extremities may be impaired; this is one reason why you must examine your feet carefully and wear properly fitted footwear.

You are more prone to experiencing damage of your extremities, which can result in decreased sensation, pain, and a higher risk of infection with slower healing. Take care of your extremities and seek prompt medical attention if you notice a change or receive an injury. Untreated problems can lead to gangrene and a potential loss of limbs.

A peripheral vascular disease also results in the hardening of the arteries. Your blood vessels may be narrowed and lose flexibility.

High blood pressure develops partially as a result of a peripheral vascular disease. Sixty-eight percent of individuals who have diabetes have high blood pressure; the only way you can determine if hypertension is a problem for you is to have your blood pressure checked.

High blood pressure can result in damage to your entire body. It is particularly dangerous if you have diabetes because your heart, kidneys, and organs that impact blood pressure are already at risk for damage. If you have diabetes and high blood pressure, your hypertension may be difficult to control — you may need two or three medications in order to maintain a healthy blood pressure.

Coronary Artery Disease

Your coronary arteries supply blood to your heart, and when they get blocked a cardiac catheterization or bypass surgery may be needed.

Cardiovascular Disease Risks

Coronary artery disease can cause heart attacks, which kill more diabetics than any other illnesses.

To protect your heart health, maintain a healthy weight, eat a diet low in fat and sodium, exercise regularly, don't smoke, and keep your blood glucose levels within normal limits.

Cerebrovascular Disease

Impaired circulation to your brain may cause mental changes and deterioration. As a diabetic, you have an increased risk of stroke due to cerebrovascular disease and hypertension.

Controlling your blood pressure and blood sugar levels, staying active, and maintaining a healthy weight, will all help prevent stroke and maintain brain function.

Kidney Damage Caused by Diabetes

Diabetes is the leading cause of renal disease, which if left untreated can result in a need for dialysis or kidney transplant, or even death. The tiny blood vessels in your kidneys are susceptible to damage from high blood sugar and blood pressure levels.

Keep your kidneys healthy by not smoking and maintaining healthy blood sugar and blood pressure levels. Impaired kidney function can even interfere with heart function.

Vision Changes

Sometimes a suspicion that diabetes may be present is first identified during a routine eye exam. Diabetes causes changes in the blood vessels of your eyes, and is even a leading cause of blindness, so get regular eye exams and keep your blood sugar levels controlled in order to avoid complications.

Elevated Infection Risks

Seek prompt medical attention if you display signs of infection. In addition to contracting infections in the community due to slow healing and poor circulation, you may be exposed to life-threatening infections more frequently than other people.

If you require hospitalization for diabetes complications, you may be exposed to infection. Should this occur, you

may have a difficult time recuperating from the illness.

There are many potentially life-threatening infections that are difficult to cure, and you are most likely to be exposed to them while hospitalized. Prevent exposure to harmful microorganisms by using good hygienic practices, such as frequent handwashing, and keeping yourself well so you do not need to be hospitalized.

It’s Not All Bad News

By now you may be feeling scared and overwhelmed after learning about all of the serious illnesses that diabetes puts you at risk for. Relax — the power is yours.

While some people have extremely hard to treat diabetes, most can successfully manage their diabetes by living well, paying attention to their bodies, and seeing their health care providers regularly.

If you take good care of yourself, it is unlikely you will experience these comorbidities. The choice is yours. Just because you have diabetes, it does not mean you are doomed to have poor health.

We live at a time when more is known about how to live well with diabetes than ever before. Take advantage of current knowledge, tools, and technology. Take care of your diabetes today and you will be rewarded with a long, healthy life. If you already have some comorbidities it is never too late to take steps to reverse or manage them better. Your life, your health — it’s up to you.