The Connection Between Diabetes and Libido Changes

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Diabetes and Sexual Dysfunction

Sometimes I find that people have a hard time talking about their health. When people have diabetes, a lot of people don't want to open up because it is their perception that it is their fault, so instead of asking questions and getting information that could benefit them, they sit stone-faced in an appointment.

And to talk about sexual dysfunction? Forget about it!

But it is a real concern and something that is not often discussed because a lot of people find it embarrassing. Well, friends, I'm here to tell you that as a healthcare professional, we are here to help!

But just in case, here's a discussion about what causes sexual dysfunction – and what you can do to help!

Erectile Dysfunction

Typically, sexual dysfunction and diabetes are associated with men, and it is a common problem! However, just because it is common does not mean that it has to happen to you.

When we refer to sexual dysfunction in diabetes, we are typically discussing impotence, also commonly known as erectile dysfunction (ED). ED is when a man either cannot achieve an erection or cannot maintain an erection when it occurs.

So, why does ED happen in the first place? Well, when your blood sugar levels are out of control, especially for a long period of time, there can be damage to blood vessels and nerves in the body – even in the penis. When this happens, blood flow that is necessary for having an erection and maintaining an erection is inhibited.

But what if your blood sugar levels are relatively under good control? Well, even if your blood sugar levels are under control, you can still suffer from ED – other coexisting conditions that are associated with type 2 diabetes can contribute to the development of ED, such as obesity, hypertension, and elevated cholesterol. Smoking can also play a role.

What About the Women?

Although sexual dysfunction is more common in men, regarding type 2 diabetes, women can also have issues too.

Remember how we discussed that nerve damage occurs in the genital area after prolonged periods of elevated blood sugar levels? Well, this can happen to women as well. When women have nerve damage to the vaginal area, they can suffer from vaginal dryness, as well as decreased sensation. This causes both uncomfortable intercourse and near impossible orgasms.

So… What Can You Do About Diabetes and Sexual Dysfunction?

The most important thing you can do is, of course, control your blood sugar levels. Controlling your blood sugar levels can minimize the risk of nerve damage from occurring. Not only that, but it will reduce the risk of other complications from occurring.

If you already have nerve damage, controlling your blood sugar levels will prevent nerve damage from worsening.

Or if your blood sugar levels are adequate but you have a coexisting condition that is contributing to your sexual dysfunction, seek help in controlling that condition. If you are a smoker, quit smoking. Not only will it improve your sexual dysfunction, but it will also help a myriad of other conditions you may be experiencing, and prevent other conditions from occurring. The CDC has an excellent list of smoking cessation resources.

There are also medications that can help – but this involves speaking to your physician. These medications contribute to improving blood flow to your penis, which aids in getting and sustaining an erection. These meds include:

- Sildenafil (Viagra, Revatio)
- Tadalafil (Cialis, Adcirca)
- Vardenafil (Levitra, Staxyn)
- Avanafil (Stendra)

There are also devices that can help to draw blood to your penis. They are placed on the penis and uses a pump, creating an erection. They are simple to operate and has a low risk of side effects.

In the event where medications or a penis pump is not recommended or not effective, a penile implant may be recommended. Keep in mind that this is a surgical option.

For women, performing Kegel exercises during intercourse may improve the chances of achieving an orgasm, as can attempting different sexual positions. For the vaginal dryness, vaginal lubricants are recommended.

The Bottom Line…

Just because sexual dysfunction is a common issue with diabetics doesn’t mean that it is inevitable. However, if this is something that you suffer from, keep in mind that it is treatable – but you need to speak with your physician about your diabetes and sexual dysfunction troubles.