Preventing type 2 diabetes

As people continue to eat more high-fat, high calorie fast food and become less active, it's not surprising that type 2 diabetes—nearly 90 per cent of all diabetes cases—is on the rise. More troubling is that doctors are seeing an increase of the disease, considered an "older adult" condition, in children.



But there is a bright side: by following the tips below and making a few lifestyle changes, you can more than halve your risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Be aware of the risks. Several factors can increase your chances of developing type 2 diabetes. These include: a family history of type 2 diabetes; obesity (a body mass index higher than 27); high blood pressure; an "apple-shaped" figure (i.e., you tend to carry extra weight around the waist); an inactive lifestyle; Aboriginal, African, Latin American or Asian ancestry; age—you're 65 or older; and a high level of cholesterol or fats in the blood.

Get moving. Many studies have shown that regular physical activity—30 minutes or more five days a week—can reduce your chances of developing diabetes by over 50 per cent. The good news is that even small daily changes can add up to help you reach this goal. Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator, get off the bus a few stops early and walk the rest of the way, park at the far end of the lot and get those precious extra steps in, or leave the car at home entirely and walk or cycle. Daily activity will help you keep your weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol at bay and, in turn, reduce your diabetic risk factors.

Eat well. You wouldn't feed your car leaded gas, so why would you fuel your body with "toxic" foods? At the grocery store, make wiser food choices by stocking up on more produce, whole grains, lean proteins and lower fat dairy, while avoiding the typically higher fat, sugar and salt contents of processed foods. If you have to eat fast foods then choose the lighter alternatives many restaurants now offer. Skip nutritionally empty and sugar-loaded sodas or "fruit drinks" altogether and opt for low fat milk or water instead.

Maintain a healthy body weight. Consult your doctor to find out whether your weight is suitable for your age and height. If you're body mass index (BMI) is over 27, work with your doctor and a dietician to develop a plan to increase your physical activity and reduce your fat and calorie intake. A few simple changes can go a long way in helping to lose weight and reduce the risk for type 2 diabetes.

Butt out. If heart disease and lung cancer aren't good enough reasons to quit smoking, a recent study revealed that pack-a-day smokers were 94 per cent more likely to develop diabetes than non-smokers.

Avoid the bottle. Aside from the obvious complications of drinking too much alcohol—liver damage, addiction issues, dehydration, etc.—it can also affect your body weight and insulin levels. These factors, in turn, can make you more susceptible to developing diabetes.

Get tested. It's estimated that nearly a third of all people with type 2 diabetes don't know they have it. Symptoms include: a noticeable increase in thirst or hunger, fatigue, increased urination, blurry vision, unexplainable weight loss and sores that won't heal. If you experience any of these symptoms or are over 45 and have two or more risk factors, see your doctor immediately. The earlier type 2 diabetes is diagnosed, the better the chances of getting it under control and limiting its damaging effects on the body.

Though it may not be entirely possible to avoid type 2 diabetes entirely, keeping active, maintaining a healthy weight and eating well can minimize your risk.