

Living with DIABETES

CHECK IF YOU'RE AT RISK AND ASK FOR SUPPORT
BY VICTORIA ZIMMER



by Victoria Zimmer

In Huron and Perth counties, an estimated 11,000 people live with diabetes and about 24,500 with prediabetes, underlining the importance of raising awareness of its risk factors.

Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body can't properly use the insulin that is released or does not make enough insulin. As a result, sugar builds up in the blood instead of being used as energy. Type 2 diabetes and prediabetes usually develop in adulthood, although more children and adolescents are being diagnosed. Prediabetes means a person's blood glucose (sugar) levels are higher than normal, but not high enough to be diagnosed as Type 2. Nearly half of those with prediabetes will develop Type 2 diabetes.

"There are a number of factors that increase the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, and anyone who has one or more risk factors should be tested more frequently or start regular screening earlier with their family doctor," said Aileen Knip, a Registered Nurse and Certified Diabetes Educator with the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance.

In fact, Diabetes Canada recommends screening every three years for adults over 40. Diabetes Canada also

offers a free online test to assess your risk of developing prediabetes or diabetes. Visit www.diabetestest.ca and fill out a 'CANRISK' test to identify your risk.

Risk factors include:

- having a parent, brother, or sister with diabetes
- being a member of a high-risk group (Indigenous, Hispanic, South Asian, Asian, or African descent)
- having health complications associated with diabetes
- having given birth to a baby that weighed more than nine pounds at birth or having had gestational diabetes (diabetes during pregnancy)
- having high blood pressure
- having high cholesterol or other fats in the blood
- being overweight, especially if that weight is mostly carried around the stomach

Research shows that some long-term diabetes complications, such as heart disease and nerve damage, may begin during prediabetes, but the risk of developing diabetes can be reduced by nearly 60 per cent through lifestyle modifications. With the recent update of Canada's Food Guide, Canadians are being encouraged to consume half their plate as fruits and vegetables, make water the drink of choice, reduce intake of processed foods, include whole grains, and reduce intake of saturated fat from animal sources.

Many of these guidelines can be beneficial in reducing the risk of developing, or managing, Type 2 diabetes.



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For more information on Canada's updated Food Guide visit <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/healthy-eating-recommendations>.

"The Huron Perth Diabetes Education Centres offer support for those individuals living with diabetes," Aileen said. "Individuals do not need referrals from their family doctors to access any of our services; they can simply call our office, visit our website or email a question."

Community resources

Diabetes Education Centres are located throughout Huron and Perth in Goderich, Exeter, Wingham, Listowel, Seaforth, St. Marys and Stratford. To learn more, visit www.huronperthdiabetes.com or call 1-519-272-8210 x2365. When individuals enter the program they have access to a Registered Nurse and Registered Dietitian who provide individualized advice based on the latest Diabetes Canada Guidelines.

Support and education is also available on a monthly basis at the Diabetes Support Group in Stratford. Taking place on the first Thursday of the month (with a break in July and August) from 2-3:30 p.m. in the Community Room at Sobeys, this group discusses a different topic each month. Those living with diabetes and their caregivers are welcome to attend and there is no cost for this group. Upcoming diabetes topics include foot care (March) and eye health (April).

The HPHA Diabetes Education Centre offers an annual diabetes event for individuals living with diabetes and their caregivers in Mitchell, with this year's event being held April 30 at the Mitchell Community Arena. The event features knowledgeable guest speakers, a hot lunch, and local diabetes service providers. Individuals can register online at www.huronperthdiabetes.com or by calling 519-272-8210 x2365. ■

Victoria Zimmer is a Registered Dietitian and Certified Diabetes Educator with the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance. She can be reached at 519-272-8210 x2366 or via email at victoria.zimmer@hpha.ca. Learn more at www.huronperthdiabetes.com.

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