A Lifestyle Medicine Approach to Type 2 Diabetes



Type 2 diabetes is a common long-term condition where the body does not use insulin properly, causing blood sugar levels to rise. It can lead to symptoms such as increased thirst, frequent urination, tiredness and blurred vision.

It may be supported by making some simple lifestyle changes, as detailed below.

Make healthy food choices



The best foods to eat to help manage type 2 diabetes are high in fibre, protein and healthy fats.[1]

Where possible, include vegetables, beans, lentils, whole grains, nuts, seeds, oily fish, and unsweetened yoghurt, as these can help support steadier blood sugar levels.

Choose smaller portions of refined carbohydrates and sugary foods, and aim for balanced meals that combine protein, fibre and healthy fats.

Good quality sleep is key

Getting enough good-quality sleep can help people living with type 2 diabetes. It may support better blood sugar control, improve insulin sensitivity, reduce stress, and help with energy, concentration and appetite regulation.[2]

Aim for a regular sleep routine, keep your bedroom dark and cool, and try to limit caffeine and screens before bed.

Reduce smoking and drinking



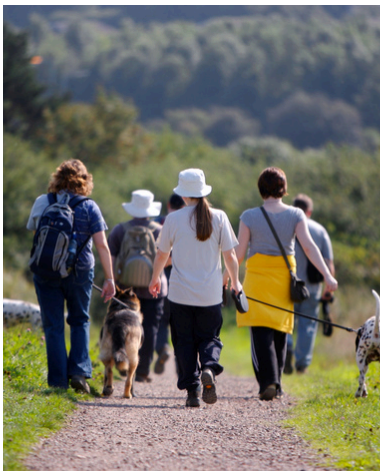
Cigarettes, vapes and alcohol can make it harder to manage blood sugar, increase inflammation, affect heart health and raise the risk of long-term complications. Reducing or stopping their use can support healthier blood glucose control and overall wellbeing.[3]

References:

1. Reynolds A, Mitri J. Dietary Advice For Individuals with Diabetes. [Updated 2024 Apr 28]. In: Feingold KR, Adler RA, Ahmed SF, et al., editors. Endotext [Internet]. South Dartmouth (MA): MDText.com, Inc.; 2000-
2. How does sleep affect diabetes? Bupa UK
3. Rimm EB, Chan J, Stampfer MJ, Colditz GA, Willett WC. Prospective study of cigarette smoking, alcohol use, and the risk of diabetes in men. BMJ. 1995 Mar.

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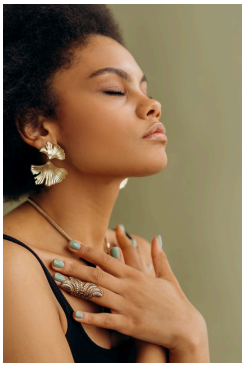
Exercise can improve pain



Regular exercise can play an important role in managing type 2 diabetes. It helps your muscles use glucose more effectively, which can support better blood sugar control and improve insulin sensitivity over time.[4]

Aim to include a mix of aerobic activity, such as brisk walking or cycling, and strength-based exercise if you can. Even small amounts of movement spread throughout the day can make a positive difference.

Manage stress



High stress levels can affect blood sugar control, sleep, appetite and motivation, so finding ways to relax may support both physical and mental wellbeing.[5]

Helpful strategies can include deep breathing, mindfulness, gentle movement, time in nature and talking to someone you trust. Building small stress-management habits into your routine can make it easier to stay consistent with other healthy lifestyle changes.

Prevention is better than cure

A healthy lifestyle is key to keeping your body and mind well and active, and can help you reduce the risks associated with diabetes before they become a problem. Speak to your GP and find out more about Lifestyle Medicine by visiting http://bslm.org.uk

References:

4. Exercise for Diabetes. DiabetesUK
5. Eshete A, Mohammed S, Deresse T, Kifleyohans T, Assefa Y. Association of stress management behavior and diabetic self-care practice among diabetes type II patients in North Shoa Zone: a cross-sectional study. BMC Health Serv Res. 2023 Jul

The advice contained within this factsheet is as accurate and as comprehensive as possible, but it is only general advice, and should not be used as a substitute for the individual advice received from consulting a person's own doctor.
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