

wake-up call

a **diagnosis of prediabetes**
doesn't have to be all bad news.


you can take steps
to **stop the progression**

by stephanie r. conner

A heart attack. A car accident. A loved one's life-threatening diagnosis. Sometimes it takes a dramatic event to make us notice our dangerous or unhealthy behaviors and commit to change. Fortunately for people on the track for diabetes, the wake-up call doesn't have to be so severe.

Although learning you have prediabetes does not seem like good news, it can help you make lifestyle changes designed to slow the progression of the condition. Research shows that it all comes down to two familiar tactics: diet and exercise.

what is prediabetes?

 There are two main types of diabetes. Those with type 1 can't produce insulin, the hormone that helps the body use glucose (sugar) for fuel. Type 2, the more common, results from the body's inability to process insulin. If the glucose can't go to the cells, it builds up in the blood, which is why blood glucose levels are used to diagnose the disease.

Prediabetes, which affects 57 million people in the U.S., according to the American Diabetes Association (ADA), is the precursor to type 2






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and is defined by high blood glucose levels that aren't high enough to be classified as diabetes.

Left unmanaged and untreated, type 2 diabetes can lead to complications such as heart disease, blindness and kidney damage.

“Being diagnosed with prediabetes is a warning sign. At this stage of blood glucose abnormality, people can definitely make a difference for their future health and whether or not it will include type 2 diabetes,” says Sue McLaughlin, R.D., a certified diabetes educator and president of healthcare and education for the ADA.

why exercise matters

 Being overweight contributes to diabetes risk, and exercise is essential to your weight-loss efforts. The Diabetes Prevention Program clinical research study showed that people at risk for diabetes can reduce their risk by losing “a modest amount of weight through diet and exercise.”

“One of the more potent treatments for diabetes—and more so for prediabetes—would be appropriate amounts of exercise,” says Edward M. Phillips, M.D., coauthor of *ACSM's Exercise Is Medicine: A Clinician's Guide to Exercise Prescription*.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend 2½ hours a week of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity, or half that of vigorous physical activity.

“The challenge is how to get people to do it,” Phillips says. “Americans are more inactive than active. There's only about one-fourth of the population that fulfills the requirements.”


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He adds that knowledge isn't enough—it's about motivation.

"People are not stupid," he says. "They read. They know what they should be eating and that they should be exercising."


Phillips says there is a science to motivation. "It's not just an intrinsic part of personality. But it can be harnessed by a wellness coach or an appropriately trained health professional."

making better food choices

 To help delay the onset of diabetes, nutrition is essential, but how do you know which diet to follow?

The Diabetes Prevention Program's participants found success through a low-calorie and low-fat diet. The study showed that by exercising at least 150 minutes a week and following a low-fat, lower-calorie diet—which led to a 5 to 7 percent reduction in weight—the participants, all of whom had prediabetes, reduced their risk of progressing to type 2 diabetes by 58 percent.

As you work to make these changes, your physician, a dietitian or a certified diabetes educator can help. The key is staying focused.

"The diagnosis of prediabetes or diabetes is not a death sentence," McLaughlin says. "With education, information and help from health-care providers and support of family, these can both be managed well." 

what can i eat?

The American Diabetes Association's MyFoodAdvisor helps you understand which foods are best for you, and helps you create meal plans and research recipes. Learn more at tracker.diabetes.org/myfoodadvisor.html.

go 



foods to choose

If you recently found out you have prediabetes, you're probably thinking a lot about your diet these days. Fortunately, the same nutrition principles that can help you prevent diabetes also can help stave off heart disease and cancer.

"If everyone would follow [the U.S. Dietary Guidelines], it would be very helpful," says Deborah Fillman, R.D., a certified diabetes educator and a spokeswoman for the American Association of Diabetes Educators. For those looking to manage prediabetes, she suggests using the guidelines to get the most out of these food groups.

Vegetables. You don't have to skip starchy veggies like potatoes, Fillman says, but balance them with plenty of green, leafy vegetables.

Fruits. "Fruits contain carbohydrates, but to omit them would be to omit nutrients your body needs," Fillman says. Monitor your portion sizes, and if you're buying canned fruit, make sure it's packed in water or natural juice.

Whole grains. "At least half of all the grains you eat should come from whole grains," Fillman advises.

Dairy. Stick with skim or 1-percent-fat varieties.

Protein. Choose lean meats, and bake, broil or grill them. And don't forget beans—they're a protein too.

Learn more at health.gov/dietaryguidelines.