

Defeat Diabetes

If diabetes runs in your family or you've been diagnosed with pre-diabetes, take action now by losing weight if you need to.

"Weight gain is the leading risk factor for diabetes," says Katz.

The quality of your diet can influence your risk for diabetes, too. To help maintain healthy blood-sugar levels, try these strategies:

Seek out soluble fiber. Soluble fiber is effective in stabilizing blood glucose and insulin levels. It helps slow food absorption so your blood sugar doesn't routinely spike, which can stress the pancreas. "By eating a high-soluble-fiber diet, you won't need as much insulin," says Katz. Foods high in soluble fiber include oatmeal, beans, peas, lentils, barley, apples, bananas, strawberries, brown rice and whole-grain bread and cereal.

Avoid highly processed foods. Conversely, foods made from refined starches and added sugar — including doughnuts, chips, cookies, cakes, pastries, crackers, white bread and granola bars — raise blood sugar and put a major demand on the pancreas. If your diet is filled with such foods, start substituting brown rice for white rice, for example, and whole-grain crackers and bread for the regular varieties.

Combat Cancer

If cancer runs in your family, a healthful plant-based diet, which emphasizes brightly colored fruits and vegetables, is your best bet for warding off this killer. But your strategies can be even more specific, depending on the type of cancer you're targeting.

Eat plenty of low-fat or non-fat dairy products if colon cancer is your concern. Aim for 1,000 mg. of calcium a day — the equivalent of three 8-oz. glasses of skim milk.

Consume plenty of whole grains. Besides soluble fiber, whole-grain foods, such as whole-wheat bread and bran cereals, also are good sources of insoluble fiber, the kind that speeds waste through the digestive tract.

Plus, whole-grain breads and cereals, as well as beans, barley

and lentils, are excellent sources of vitamins C, E and A — antioxidants that may help neutralize free radicals in blood, which have been associated with an increased risk for cancer.

Limit alcohol. The American Cancer Society advises moderate alcohol consumption — no more than one drink a day for women and two a day for men — because a higher intake has been associated with an increased risk for breast and colon cancer, as well as a host of other conditions.

"Moderate alcohol intake may reduce your risk for heart disease, which is something to consider if you have heart disease in your family," says Katz. "But if you have a family history of breast or colon cancer, you'd be well-advised to avoid alcohol altogether."

Finally, eat reasonable portion sizes of even healthful foods. Too much good-for-you foods can cause weight gain, which can hurt your heart and raise your risk for diabetes and some cancers.

Put Up a Food Fight

For more information about how your diet can reduce your risk for diabetes, visit the American Diabetes Association's Web site, www.diabetes.org. The ADA's own food pyramid, the Diabetes Food Pyramid, can be accessed at www.diabetes.org/nutrition-and-recipes/nutrition/foodpyramid.jsp.

For ideas on how to incorporate more fish into your diet to reduce your risk for heart disease, visit the National Fisheries Institute at www.aboutseafood.com. There you'll find recipes and cooking tips, as well as nutrition information.

To learn more about the relationship between diet and cancer prevention, visit the American Institute for Cancer Research at www.aicr.org and click on the "Diet & Cancer" tab at the top. The AICR also offers a free online nutrition hotline that connects you with a registered dietitian, who specializes in diet and cancer, to answer specific questions.

To personalize the USDA's food pyramid to determine exactly how much of each food group you should eat each day based on your age, gender and level of physical activity, log on to www.mypyramid.gov.

Websites To Bookmark

www.diabetes.org
www.mypyramid.gov

Heat And Other Summer Health Hazards For Seniors

Summer provides an excellent opportunity for seniors to get outside, increase their activity, and avoid a year-round sedentary lifestyle. But summer also holds risks — such as heat, skin cancer and even tetanus — that may strike seniors more often than the general population.

Older people are disproportionately affected by prolonged heat waves of over-90 degree temperatures with high dew points. Factors include age, disease and even medication.

Many medications often taken by seniors for high blood pressure and heart disease, for example, are diuretics — they remove salt and fluid volume from the body. Coupled with perspiring from high temperatures, diuretics can lead to dehydration, which, in turn, can lead

Drinking at least six 8-ounce glasses of fluid each day will help prevent dehydration.

to discomfort, confusion, damage to major organs, and even death.

Most healthy individuals will naturally replenish their body's fluids when they get thirsty. But for many older adults, the thirst mechanism is not as finely tuned as in younger people. And for those seniors who have suffered from a stroke, Alzheimer's or another brain disease, their thirst mechanism is even less likely to direct them to consume enough fluids.

Drinking at least six 8-ounce glasses of fluid each day will help prevent dehydration. Salt tablets are not recommended because they can cause more harm than good.

In addition, seniors' bodies are not as able to regulate temperature. Check in on frail seniors frequently during the summer to make sure they're taking in enough fluids, their homes are properly ventilated and their mental state is normal. Confusion is a sign of heat exhaustion and dehydration. If a senior has a fever or exhibits behavioral changes from the heat, take him or her to an urgent care facility immediately for treatment of possible heat stroke and dehydration.

Seniors should be on the lookout for skin cancer as well. Age is a factor in many types of cancer, including skin cancers — basal cell, squamous cell and melanoma. Look for moles that change color or whose borders change, or for rough, raised areas of skin that do not heal, even after applying moisturizers and first aid creams. In the meantime, protect yourself from the sun's rays, particularly if you're fair-skinned or have a history of skin cancer. During a regular checkup, have your physician examine your body for possible skin trouble spots.

Tetanus is an unusual but hard-to-diagnose condition that affects seniors more than any other age group. Tetanus occurs when a microorganism, often found in soil and manure, infects a cut. Get a tetanus vaccine booster shot at least every 10 years. Because some seniors may not have received the original series of tetanus shots as children, they should first have these. A blood test can determine if you've had the original tetanus shots, but your physician may decide it's easier to give you the complete series if you're not sure.

If possible, take advantage of summer weather to enjoy walks or light exercise, such as gardening. It may improve your balance, build muscle mass, lower blood pressure, improve cardiac health, and provide other health benefits — emotional and physical. But don't do too much too soon. Whether it's gardening or exercising, ease into it and gradually build your endurance. Watch the heat and your fluid intake, and you can enjoy summer in good health.

