

HealthTalk: What if Type 2 Diabetes Runs in Your Family?

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Q: Type 2 diabetes runs in my family, what can I do to avoid getting it?

A: People with a family history of type 2 diabetes do have greater odds of developing the disease, but research is clear that a healthy lifestyle can substantially cut risk, or at least help people live more years without diabetes. One of the most important steps for preventing type 2 diabetes is to reach and maintain a healthy weight. Excess body fat around your waist seems particularly linked with increased risk, even if you are not extremely overweight. Even modest weight loss reduces risk if you are overweight now. Type 2 diabetes stems from insulin resistance which is the body's inability to use insulin effectively, despite producing plenty of it. Regardless of your weight, do enough physical activity so it adds up to 30 to 60 minutes daily. Daily physical activity seems to directly reduce insulin resistance in addition to reducing or preventing weight gain. Tobacco avoidance and healthy food choices also probably help: Vegetables, fruits, whole grains and dried beans contain antioxidants that fight inflammation linked to this disease, and provide fiber that may also help reduce risk. Aim for at least two-and-a-half cups (preferably three-and-a-half to five cups) of vegetables and fruits daily, and at least three to four servings of whole grains. Limit processed meat and sugar-sweetened drinks, since evidence suggests frequent consumption may increase risk of diabetes. And choose lowfat dairy, fish, poultry and limited lean red meat. All of these recommendations help you stay lean and also decrease risk for other chronic diseases like cancer and heart disease. Our genes can make us more vulnerable to diseases like diabetes, but the importance of lifestyle choices means there's no reason to feel doomed.

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