

Alberta Healthy Living Program (Diversity, Mandarin, and Cantonese)

Prediabetes

I have just completed my yearly laboratory tests. My family doctor has suggested that I avoid my consumption of rice and noodles in my diet because my blood sugar level is getting higher. I have Prediabetes.

On social media, we are often presented with false information about diabetes. Many sources indicate diabetes or pre-diabetes is caused by having too much sugar and starch in our diet. In fact, the truth is that there are many reasons why someone may develop pre-diabetes. We do not need to avoid eating rice, noodles and in fact, grains and starches are part of a healthy balanced meal. Also, we can include a small amount of sugar into our diet without affecting our health. We will discuss more about healthy meal balancing in our show today.

What is Prediabetes?

Prediabetes is when your blood sugar or glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough to be called as type 2 diabetes.

- The laboratory tests to diagnose an individual with prediabetes include: Fasting blood glucose (nothing to eat or drink for at least 8 hours): 6.1 to 6.9 mmol/L
- Oral glucose tolerance test (drink liquid with 15 packages of sugar): 7.8 - 11.0 mmol/L
- Hemoglobin A1C (average blood sugar levels over the past 3 months): 6.0 - 6.4%

Please note that we cannot use a (home) blood sugar or glucose meter (glucometer) to diagnose an individual with prediabetes.

What are the risk factors for Prediabetes?

Having excess fat around the waist (“belly fat”), high blood pressure, high levels of LDL-cholesterol (“lousy” cholesterol) and triglycerides (“bad” fat), low levels of HDL cholesterol (“good” cholesterol), and these are considered “metabolic” syndrome which places an individual at significant risk of developing prediabetes and eventually diabetes. Individuals with the metabolic syndrome are also at significant risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

Age can be a contributing factor. Family history and if you have had gestational diabetes (diabetes in pregnancy)

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Being Asian, we are at high risk of developing diabetes as compared to Caucasians. Hence for us we should get screened more frequently for prediabetes and diabetes. You can discuss this with your family physician.

Prediabetes symptoms are similar as the signs of type 2 diabetes. The most common signs and symptoms may include:

Weight change (sudden gain or loss), frequent thirst and urination, extreme tiredness, blurred vision, tingling or numbness on the hands or feet, cuts and bruises that are slow to heal.

However, some individuals may not notice any symptoms. If you or your loved ones are at risk of having Prediabetes, or if you suspect having Prediabetes or type 2 diabetes, please do not wait and to contact your family physician quickly.

What are the complications associated with Prediabetes?

While individuals with Prediabetes do not have the increased risk for microvascular disease as seen in diabetes, nevertheless they are at high risk for the development of heart disease and stroke. Prediabetes is also a warning of type 2 diabetes.

Can I take medications for Prediabetes?

In some cases, your physician might recommend that you use oral diabetes medications to help normalize blood sugar. This is more likely if lifestyle changes have not helped improve your blood sugar levels and/or you have multiple risk factors for Type 2 diabetes.

Can we prevent type 2 diabetes if we were now diagnosed with Prediabetes?

Not all individuals with prediabetes will necessarily progress to diabetes.

Research shows that if you can reduce your blood sugar levels with simple lifestyle changes you can delay or prevent type 2 diabetes.

What kind of lifestyle should one adopt after being diagnosed with Prediabetes?

- Manage your body weight. Research has shown by reducing your current weight by 5-10%, you can reduce your risk of developing diabetes by half.

If person weights 100kg, this means losing approximately 10 – 20lbs Healthy weight loss is 1-2 lbs each week.

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- Eat well-balanced meals. Aim to eat 3 regular meals each day and to spread out your food evenly, to help control blood glucose levels.

For some people, having a snack between a meal can reduce help to reduce hunger which it may then help you to eat less in your next meal.

Healthy meal should have $\frac{1}{4}$ plate of grain products like rice, noodles, $\frac{1}{4}$ with chicken, fish, tofu and $\frac{1}{2}$ with a variety of colourful vegetables. You can add a medium size fruit such as an apple or orange at the same meal.

- Be active. Walking, cleaning house, shoveling snow, and any form of movement that cause your body to burn calories. Regular physical activity helps prevent sugar from building up in our blood. Safety first. If you have been inactive for some time, talk to your physician first before starting any exercise program that is more demanding than brisk walking.

Are there any special diets such as intermittent fasting which you would recommend helping with weight loss?

Everybody is different. There is no one special diet that fits all. If you would like to start any kind of diet, please speak with your doctors and/or dietitians first to find out if you are suitable, without compromising your health and wellbeing.

Are there any kinds of food to avoid with having Prediabetes?

All foods can be included. It is equally important to appreciate what to eat, when to eat and how much to eat.

Try to limit foods with added sugars such as juice, regular soft drinks, iced tea, bubble tea. Water is the best fluid for hydration.

Also consider limiting sugar, adding honey, condensed milk to your coffee and tea and when cooking (sweet sauce).

Other strategies that one could also adopt in addition to healthy eating and staying active?

In addition to eating healthy, being physically active, having good sleep and stress management are also important. Speak to your physician or healthcare team if you feel you might have anxiety or depression.

With the prices of food costs on the rise, many of us are concerned about how to eat healthy on a budget, can you provide me with some suggestions to spend less money on food?

There are many stress-free ways to make healthy eating fit your budget.

Vegetables and Fruit:

Canned and Frozen Vegetables and Fruit, are just as nutritious as fresh and store longer, look for plain frozen or packed in water canned – labelled no added salt or sugar. For fresh vegetables and fruits, they are best in taste, quality, and price when they are in season.

Whole grain products:

Compare prices: When whole grain bread is on sale, buy them in bundles and freeze to use later. You can also consider buying bread which is close to their “best before date” since they usually are priced at a discount.

High protein foods:

Plant based proteins such as beans, lentils are readily available canned or dried, and they are usually lower cost than meat, poultry, or fresh fish. Eggs and milk are an excellent source of protein as well.

How can Alberta Healthy Living Program help support the Chinese in the community?

- We have one Registered Dietitian speaking both Mandarin and Cantonese who can offer one-on-one advice via phone, Zoom or in person meeting.
- These services have no charge and are covered by Alberta Health. You do not need a referral from a health care provider - you can just call to book appointment.
- All our programs and services can be accessed through one toll-free number: 1-844-527-1160. Please write this number down. An English recording will run and ask them to wait until a person answer to state Mandarin for the clerks to quickly access an interpreter.
- Better choices, better health (BCBH) for chronic disease management and BCBH-chronic pain that are offered in Cantonese, and they can register for this 6-week program (one 2.5-hour session per week) by also phoning toll-free: 1-844-527-1160.