

Life Modification with Diet in Diabetes

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Type 2 diabetes which is largely an adulthood disease, affects more than 8 crore Indians. Most people with type 2 diabetes have disease-related complications and reduced longevity. The disease is particularly devastating for the growing numbers of younger people affected, who tend to be more obese and lose more life-years through diabetes. Current guidelines for management of type 2 diabetes focus heavily on multiple drug treatments to reduce blood glucose and the associated elevated risks of heart disease, but life expectancy remains substantially reduced.

Largely Type 2 diabetes is strongly related to weight gain in adult life. There is a linear relationship between obesity and diabetes risk. Recent studies have shown how people with type 2 diabetes can be returned to normal glucose control by calorie restriction. And here comes the role of a nutritionist. The challenge remained to test whether such an intervention was practicable in routine clinical practice. DiRECT, which is a primary care led weight management trial in UK involving weight loss of at least 10–15 kg have been shown to achieve normalisations of blood glucose in people with short-duration type 2 diabetes. This has huge economic, social and medical implications.

The treatment of type 2 diabetes has traditionally consisted of the initiation of medications in the form of oral agents and/or insulin. Lifestyle advice is included in all treatment guidelines, but doctors and nurses often lack time and specific expertise in nutrition, how to change food related behaviour and other lifestyles recommendations for diabetes. Also many patients also find it easy to gulp tablets rather than curbing calories and sweating out through physical activity. Nutrition advice is in practice often limited to general information about healthy living without substantial support in changing food habits. Treatment with medications does not attempt to cure or reverse the disease process, and unsupported

patients often fail in their lifestyle adjustments. A team based approach involving endocrinologist or physician, nutritionist and diabetic educator can assist patients to achieve a better glucose control. Individualized nutrition education, cooking classes can change the whole scenario.

Changes in dietary habits which can bring out substantial improvement - eating unprocessed (whole) foods which are tasty and give satiety because of their fibre content. Increase intake of vegetables, nuts and seeds, extra virgin olive oil, herbs and spices and eggs, unprocessed chicken, beans, lentils, fish, meat and dairy products. Carbohydrates and starch such as rice, bread, pasta, potatoes are limited or avoided. Eating three meals a day with very small snacks in between. Restricting added sugars to food and drink. Increasing protein in diet and restricting carbs especially refined carbs. Fruit intake is often lacking in Indian diet plans. It has been shown that taking adequate fruits can even prevent onset of diabetes! Fresh fruits should form essential part of every diabetic meal plan, however juices and very sweet fruits like grapes and bananas etc. should be avoided. Adequate water is also essential. Once it has set in, it is still possible to get partial or complete remission of diabetes in obese patients through proper nutritional based weight management programs under the guidance of a diabetes management team. This concept of getting rid of diabetes by weight reduction is evolving in a big way and in future the much awaited remission of diabetes would be possible through proper nutrition or weight loss for a wider population.

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