Diabetes Screening Recommendations

Diabetes is a lasting (*chronic*) disease. It occurs when the body does not properly use the glucose (*sugar*) that is released from food. Glucose levels are controlled by a hormone called insulin, which is made by your pancreas. Insulin moves the glucose into the body's cells. Some people who have diabetes do not make enough insulin and so are unable to absorb glucose into their cells. In others, their body cannot use insulin properly. You can have diabetes for many years and not know it because you may not have symptoms.

Diabetes can lead to serious health problems, but these are often preventable with good self-care and professional medical management. Because of this, it is important to check for the disease early, if it is suspected. This process is called screening. Finding diabetes early allows for early treatment and can stop the progress of the disease. This can help prevent the worst problems. Screening gives caregivers the ability to find diabetes in people who do not have any symptoms of the disease. Screening can also tell if someone is close to developing the disease. Then, action can be taken to delay or prevent diabetes and to help them stay healthy.

CAUSES

- **Type 1 -** The pancreas does not make any insulin.
- **Type 2 -** The pancreas does not make enough insulin, and the body cannot respond normally to the insulin that is made. Over time, glucose builds up in the bloodstream. Certain risk factors make it more likely that someone will develop type 2 diabetes, including:
  - Being older.
  - Being overweight (*obese*).
  - Having a close family member with diagnosed diabetes.
  - Having had heart disease.
  - Having high levels of saturated fat in the blood.
  - Having low levels of "good"cholesterol (high-density lipoprotein, or HDL).
  - Having high blood pressure.
  - Having had diabetes that developed during pregnancy (*gestational diabetes*).
  - Not getting enough exercise.
  - Having given birth to a baby that weighed more than 9 pounds.
  - Being of African, Asian, Hispanic, American Indian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander heritage.

SYMPTOMS

When signs of diabetes do appear, they may include:

- Needing to urinate often.
- Being more thirsty than usual.
- Being unusually tired.
- Being hungrier than usual.
- Losing weight.
- Having trouble seeing clearly.
- Sensing tingling or having no feeling (*numbness*) in the hands or feet.
- Having dry skin.
- Having sores or infections that take a long time to heal.
- Having occasional muscle cramps.

SCREENING AND DIAGNOSIS

In a screening, a caregiver will probably:

- Ask questions about your overall health. This will include questions about the health of close family members too.
- Ask about any symptoms you have had.
- Perform a physical exam.

- Order some tests. These may include:
  - **Fasting plasma glucose test**. This measures the level of glucose (*sugar*) in your blood. It is done after you have eaten nothing but water or sugar free drinks (*fasted*) for 8 hours.
  - **Random blood glucose test**. This test is done without fasting beforehand.
  - **Oral glucose tolerance test**. This is a blood test in two parts. First, a blood sample is taken after you have fasted. Then, another is taken after you drink a liquid that contains a lot of sugar.
  - **A1C measurement**. You do not need to fast for this blood test. It will show how much sugar has been in your blood over the past two to three months.

WHO SHOULD BE SCREENED

It is important to find out if someone has diabetes as soon as possible. Here are some screening guidelines that should be followed:

- Type 1 diabetes:
  - Screening is not done for this type of diabetes. This is because there is no proven treatment for people with type 1 diabetes who have no symptoms.
- Type 2 diabetes:
  - Adults who have no risk factors and no symptoms should be tested starting at age 45. If the screening tests are normal, they should be repeated every 3 years.
  - Adults who do not have symptoms but are overweight should be tested right away.
  - Adults who do not have symptoms but have one or more other risk factors should be tested right away and more often.
- Pregnant women should be screened for gestational diabetes. This type of diabetes may be caused by hormones that help the baby grow. The hormones can block the mother's insulin, which is needed to control blood sugar. Gestational diabetes can create health risks for the woman at the time of birth. That is because babies of mothers with gestational diabetes are heavier than other babies. Women with risk factors should be tested early in pregnancy and tested again at 24 to 28 weeks. Risk factors to consider are:
  - Being overweight.
  - Having had gestational diabetes (or diabetes during pregnancy) before.
  - Having close family members with diabetes.
- Women with gestational diabetes should be tested after childbirth, too. This testing should be done 6 to 12 weeks after the child is born.

PREVENTION

Diabetes can be treated. Finding it early usually allows treatment to be more successful. However, preventing or delaying the onset of diabetes is even better than treatment in terms of long-term health and well-being. Lifestyle changes can help do that and can include:

- Eating healthy foods.
- Exercising or getting some type of physical activity every day for about 30 minutes.
- Losing weight. People with pre-diabetes often need to reduce their weight by 5 to 10 percent.
- Having regular checkups with your caregiver.

Document Released: 10/14/2010 Document Re-Released: 01/09/2011
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