

From the Nutritionist

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Diabetes Awareness

Did you know that November is Diabetes Awareness Month?

You may wonder why there is a whole month dedicated to awareness about a disease. The fact is, one out of four people who have diabetes don't even know they have it, and 9 out of 10 people with pre-diabetes, which often leads to diabetes, don't know they have that. Learning more about diabetes could make a difference in your life.

Diabetes is a complex disease in which a person's body doesn't properly process food for use as energy. Most of the food we eat is turned into glucose, or sugar, for energy. A hormone called insulin is needed to get the glucose into the body's cells. In diabetes, the body either doesn't make enough insulin or can't use insulin properly. When this happens, it affects the body from head to toe. The person will have "high blood sugar" on blood tests, but there is much more to it than that. People with diabetes can end up with complications throughout the body, including heart disease, stroke, blindness and kidney failure. The good news is, there are successful treatments for diabetes that can help prevent those kinds of complications. Even better, there are ways to lower your risk of getting diabetes in the first place.

- **Weight** – A healthy weight helps lower your chances of developing diabetes. If your weight is already healthy for you, try to keep it there. If it's higher than it should be, losing 5-10% of your starting weight can lower your risk.
- **Exercise** – Physical activity is an important part of a healthy weight loss plan, but it also naturally lowers blood sugar and can help reduce your risk of diabetes. Aim for at least 30 minutes, five days a week, of moderate to vigorous physical activity.
- **Diet** – A diet high in fiber from vegetables, fruits, beans, whole grains and nuts, and low in added sugars, may help lower your chances of developing diabetes.
- **Family history** – A family history of diabetes means you are more likely to get diabetes yourself, but it doesn't mean you will definitely get it. Try even harder to work on things you have some control over, like weight, activity and diet.
- **Health care** – Regular checkups with your health care provider can help detect changes in your body that indicate pre-diabetes or diabetes. If you do develop one of these conditions, regular visits with your health care provider are an important part of treatment.

Andrea Hart, registered dietitian nutritionist and New York state-certified dietitian/nutritionist, is available for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling and as a speaker or facilitator for campus groups, panels or classes.