

Aging Arkansas

IT'S EVERYONE'S FUTURE

Keeping Arkansans over 50 informed about health, consumer issues, advocacy and senior legislation

Prevent Diabetes

BY RAY MORRIS

Currently about 26 million Americans have diabetes and the number continues to increase. Preventing and controlling diabetes starts with changing your lifestyle and it's never too late to start with these simple steps:

■ **Get plenty of rest.** Not only is a good night's sleep a mood booster; it can also help to fight off the onset of diabetes. According to a Yale University study, those who regularly got less than six hours of sleep doubled their risk of diabetes.

■ **Get physical.** According to the National Institutes of Health, more than 65% of American adults are overweight or obese and this percentage continues to climb. Not only is exercise a great solution to battling obesity, for those with diabetes, exercise can make a huge difference in diabetes management. For seniors, even minor adjustments to their lifestyle can increase their exercise, such as getting out of their favorite chair to walk around the house several times a day.

■ **Diabetes is one of the diseases where your food plays a key role in the prevention and treatment of the disease.** Taking your eating habits seriously will help shrink your waistline and lower your risk for diabetes. Certain foods can greatly affect blood sugar levels. Choosing a diet high in complex carbohydrates and fiber, and avoiding saturated fats, cholesterol and salt can help prevent and manage diabetes.

■ **See your eye doctor regularly.** Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness, or retinopathy, among adults between 20 and 74. Those with

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diabetes should have their eyes checked every year. Keeping blood sugar levels under control can slow the progression and onset of blindness in diabetics.

■ **Stay ahead of foot problems.** According to the American Diabetes Association, more than 60% of non-traumatic, lower-limb amputations occur in people with diabetes. One of the biggest threats to your feet is smoking because smoking affects small blood vessels and can ultimately lead to decreased blood flow to the feet. So take good care of your feet and see your healthcare provider right away about any foot problems or pain. Ask about prescription shoes that are covered by Medicare and other insurance plans.

■ **Get the facts.** The most important thing you can do for yourself and your loved ones, is to educate yourself about diabetes. Focus on prevention, including staying active and maintaining a healthy diet. Talk to your doctor about your risk of developing diabetes. You can still live a healthy and full life following a diabetes diagnosis by following your doctor's recommendations and monitoring your blood sugar closely.

■ **Are you at risk?** To find out your risk for developing type 2 diabetes, take the Diabetes Risk Test at stopdiabetes.com or call toll free 800-342-2383.

Mr. Morris works for Care Improvement Plus, providing specialized Medicare coverage for underserved and chronically ill beneficiaries.