

DIABETES

DIABETES AND WOMEN

NOVEMBER

14 marks World Diabetes Day. This time we will discuss diabetes in women, considering that they have more to manage when it comes to this disease.

How is diabetes different for women when compared with diabetes in men?

Diabetes increases the risk of heart disease (the most common diabetes complication) by about four times in women but only about two times in men, and women have worse outcomes after a heart attack. Women are also at a higher risk of other diabetes-related complications such as blindness, kidney disease and depression.

Not only is diabetes different among women - African American, Hispanic-Latina, American Indian-Alaska Native, and Asian-Pacific Islander are more likely to have diabetes than Caucasian women.

How a woman manages diabetes may need to change over time depending on what's happening in her life. Here's what to expect and what can be done to remain on track.

Many women will get a vaginal yeast infection at some point, but women with diabetes are at higher risk especially if their blood sugar levels are high.

More than 50% of women will suffer from a urinary tract infection (UTI) in their lifetime, and the risk may be higher if diabetic. Causes

include high blood sugar levels and poor circulation (which reduces the body's ability to fight infection). Also, some women have bladders that don't empty completely due to diabetes, creating a perfect environment for bacteria to grow.

To prevent yeast infections and UTIs, blood sugar levels should be kept as close to one's target range as possible. Other ways to prevent UTIs: drink plenty of water, wear cotton underwear, and urinate often instead of waiting until your bladder is full.

Changes in hormone levels right before and during a menstrual period can cause hard-to-predict blood sugar levels. Longer or heavier periods, and food cravings can make managing diabetes harder. A pattern may be noticed over time, or every period may be different. For this reason, it is important



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to check blood sugar levels more often, keeping track of the results to see if there is a pattern. If insulin dependent, it might be necessary to increase the dosage during the days before the menstrual period. It is important to discuss with your doctor if there is a need to alter the dosage. Being active, eating healthy food in the right amounts and getting enough sleep will all help.

Diabetes can lower your sex drive and your ability to enjoy it. For some women, vaginal dryness can make

intercourse uncomfortable or even painful. Causes may include nerve damage, reduced blood flow, medication and hormonal changes, including those during pregnancy or the menopause. Be sure to talk to your doctor if you're having any sexual issues. He or she can inform you of the various options, from using vaginal lubricants to exercises that can increase a sexual response.

After the menopause, your body produces less oestrogen, which can cause unpredictable ups and

downs in blood sugar levels. You may gain weight, which increases your need for insulin or other diabetic medication. Hot flushes and night sweats may disrupt your sleep, resulting in additional difficulty in managing blood sugar levels. This is also a period of time when sexual problems may occur, such as vaginal dryness or nerve damage.

Ask your doctor about ways to manage your menopausal symptoms. If your blood sugar levels alter, you may need to change the

dosage of your diabetes medication. After the menopause, the risk of heart disease increases, so make heart-healthy choices that will also help manage your diabetes, such as eating healthy food and being active.

Article supplied by the Hospital Particular do Algarve Group, with hospitals in Alvor and Gambelas (Faro)

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