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Exercise benefits diabetes patients

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Most people know of someone with Diabetes Mellitus, particularly since the number of people with diabetes is on the rise. Diabetes Mellitus, usually just referred to as "diabetes," is a condition of excessive sugar (glucose) in the blood and is divided into two types. In Type I diabetes, the body does not produce insulin and these types of diabetics depend on insulin injections to regulate blood sugar levels. In Type II diabetes, the body produces insulin but its release, or the body's response to it, is abnormal. Conditions that can stress glucose metabolism such as obesity and pregnancy can cause Type II diabetes to develop, typically in adulthood; the good news is, type II diabetes can often be controlled through diet and lifestyle changes.

Whether you have type I or type II diabetes, you will benefit from regular exercise. In fact, people with diabetes receive more benefit from physical exercise than those without diabetes. Exercise helps by lowering blood glucose levels and preventing or minimizing complications commonly associated with the disease, such as atherosclerosis, the hardening of arteries that can cause heart attacks and other forms of cardiovascular disease.

So how does exercise help? First of all, active muscles use sugar for energy, thus lowering blood sugar levels and decreasing the amount of insulin required. Improved cardiovascular fitness leads to stronger heart muscle, lower blood pressure, lower blood cholesterol (cholesterol production is enhanced in diabetics), improved circulation, and decreased risk of atherosclerosis. Weight-bearing exercise, like walking or jogging increase bone strength while reducing the amount of calcium found in the urine, another complication with diabetes.

Because exercise, when combined with a healthy diet, can also help you lose weight and decrease your overall body fat, the body's sensitivity to insulin, meaning that less insulin is needed to control blood sugar levels.

The key to starting an exercise program if you have diabetes is to consult your doctor, then begin *gradually*: diabetics need to be cautious of a hypoglycemic (low blood sugar) reaction, which can last up to 12 hours after exercising. Know the signs, symptoms and treatment, tell others around you, and make sure you carry identification that tells people you are diabetic. Carry a carbohydrate source to use if you notice dropping blood sugar levels and avoid exercising when blood sugars are

low.

Wearing good footwear will help prevent injury and minimize foot sores that may develop into ulcers. Diabetics have poor wound healing and have a high incidence of infection. Check your feet thoroughly after exercising – you may not feel or notice a small sore that has the potential to be a big problem.

For most people, walking is the best exercise, but other beneficial exercises include swimming and cycling. As with every exercise program, make sure to include a basic warm up and cool down. A warm up facilitates the circulation of blood, which increases oxygen to the muscles and minimizes susceptibility to injury.

Cooling down should last for two to four minutes and be a continuation of the activity but at a lower level. Cooling down flushes lactic acid from the body and helps to minimize next day soreness. Follow your cool down with stretches. Your physiotherapist can help you develop an exercise program that maximizes your potential, yet takes into consideration your special needs as a diabetic.

For further information on this topic please contact the Fawzia Sultan Rehabilitation Institute (FSRI) in Hawally at 264-2862, or check out our website at www.rehabinstitutekuwait.com

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