

I Have Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus! What Now?

Joe's Story:

Last week, I visited my family doctor's office. I had been feeling bad for months: Tired, losing weight, thirsty, blurry vision, and going to the bathroom *all* the time. I was scared it might even be cancer. After a thorough exam, blood, and urine tests, my doctor came in and sat down, a serious expression on her face. "Joe, the blood work confirms there *is* a problem: You have Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus." *Oh no!* I thought, *Insulin Shots? Constant finger sticks? Endless dieting?* But, my doctor smiled and said, "Don't worry! We can manage this. We can help you understand what's happening to your body and give you the tools to control your disease well!" I asked...

What is Type 2 Diabetes, anyway?

Type 2 Diabetes(T2DM) is a disease where the body is insensitive to an important hormone, insulin. Made by the pancreas, a vital organ in our upper abdomen, insulin's job is to command glucose (a sugar present in our food) to move into our cells. Our cells, the building blocks of our brains, heart, muscles, and nerves, need glucose like a car needs gas. Once inside the cell, glucose is used to create energy for our body to function. When we develop T2DM, often starting in middle-age, our body doesn't metabolize glucose correctly. Instead of the right amount of insulin to process our food, our pancreas releases too much insulin. Why? It could be a family trait, changes in our diet and exercise, struggles with being overweight, or a combination of these factors.

At first, our system adjusts to the extra insulin in our bloodstream, but, over time, the body's cells ignore insulin's command: Glucose is not brought into the cell and remains in high levels in the bloodstream. Our body goes to a backup energy-producing system and burns fat. Fat burning is not efficient and has some harmful by-products (a substance called ketones). We lose weight and feel very tired. These long-term symptoms of T2DM are usually what bring us to the doctor's office. Here's the good news: T2DM can be well-controlled, and you can feel better than ever!

In my next blog, we will address what you can do to control your disease and start feeling good again. And, we will talk about new medications that can help prevent long-term problems for Type 2 Diabetic patients.

I'll see you next week!

- Dr. Mary McGorray

