

DELIVERING THE DIFFICULT NEWS OF A TYPE 2 DIABETES DIAGNOSIS

SIX THINGS TO TELL YOUR PATIENTS

“You have Type 2 diabetes.” When you deliver this news to patients, many are surprised, even shocked. Research shows some are so busy processing this unwelcome information, they have a difficult time focusing on what you are saying – and about a fourth of them wonder whether it’s even true.

And yet you have a short time to ensure they understand just how serious the disease is and what needs to be done in order to remain as healthy as possible. It’s not an easy job.

For people with diabetes, learning about diabetes management is a process. Certainly you’ll need to explain the basics – including what causes diabetes and its various complications, treatment options, nutrition, and monitoring blood glucose. But to ensure they really hear you and understand that diabetes can be well-managed, the American Association of Diabetes Educators (AADE) recommends six things to be sure to tell your patients:

- **It’s not your fault.** Emphasize that diabetes can be caused by many factors, including being inherited, explaining that means they were born with a tendency to get the disease. It’s true that specific things can trigger diabetes, including stress, lack of activity and weight gain. But it also means there are things that they can do to make it better and live healthier.
- **Don’t panic!** Patients may recall the uncle with diabetes who had his leg amputated or the neighbor who died of a heart attack. Explain that there are things they can do to decrease their risk of complications. Ask them what they know about diabetes, which will help you correct their misperceptions and better help them.
- **You don’t need special foods.** People usually want to know what they can eat when they go home and worry that they’ll never be able to consume anything sweet again. Let them know they should eat the same way *everyone* should eat. That means controlling carbohydrates, portion sizes, fat and salt intake, but also enjoying the occasional sweet treat. Use diabetes as something that can motivate them (and their families) to live the healthier lives that all of us should be living.
- **Being active helps.** It doesn’t mean they have to run a marathon. Whatever their activity level, encourage them to think of how they can be more active. If they are not active, little changes can help them start, from taking the stairs instead of the elevator to parking the car at the far end of the lot. Make it clear that being active has big payoffs, helping them lower their glucose levels; strengthen their heart, bones and muscles; lose weight; and feel better.
- **Learning to master your diabetes is critical: See a diabetes educator.** Diabetes educators are licensed health care professionals who work with each patient to design a specific healthy living plan tailored to them that includes the tools and support they need. Explain that diabetes education has been proven to help patients with diabetes manage their weight and reduce their cholesterol levels and blood pressure; and that the diabetes educator acts as part of your team to help the patient manage his or her care in a way that makes sense to each person. (If you don’t currently work with a diabetes educator, find one at diabeteseducator.org.)
- **You’re not alone.** It’s important to remember is that a diabetes diagnosis is scary and can be overwhelming, so be sure to reassure your patients that although they *will* have to make changes, you and their other healthcare providers are there to help them. Encourage them to discuss experiences, ask questions and even get involved with support groups – in person or online. Here’s where a diabetes educator can really help them, which helps you. Most insurance programs cover diabetes education.

Ultimately, you want to be sure that patients newly diagnosed with diabetes leave your office knowing that they can manage the disease – and even feeling empowered to do so.