



wecareNEWS

Personal • Dedicated • Healthcare



Take time to check medication

If the medication you receive doesn't look right, the pharmacist may have made an error. Some people worry that questioning a health professional could be insulting, but if you feel something is wrong, don't dismiss your concerns. Ask questions, and seek clarification on any answers that don't make sense.

Support when you need it most

Having a loved one nearing the end of their life is an emotional time. We Care's skilled registered nurses, personal support workers, and other home care staff offer you the highest quality palliative care services to support you and your loved one.

We Care offers a free initial nursing assessment with no obligation. For details, contact your local We Care office.



Juggling work and care

If you are balancing caregiving with career responsibilities, fear not. Many employers now recognize the challenges of elder care and the loss of productivity it can cause. As such, some companies now have formal workplace programs to support you while you look after an aging adult.

If your employer doesn't have a formal program in place, talk to your manager or supervisor. Some suggestions to help you cope can include

- **Caregiver leave:** Similar to maternity leave, some companies allow a six-to-eight-week family leave that can be used to provide short-term care for elderly family members.

- **Flexible work arrangements:** A compressed work week,



a shorter workday, or job sharing can be some solutions. And depending on the nature of your job, you may even be able to work at home on occasion.

- **Special benefits:** Additional services may be available through your benefit program. Look into them, and don't forget to ask about any employee assistance programs that your workplace offers.

You can trust We Care

We Care is the largest independently owned home care service provider in Canada, with over 50 locations from coast to coast. Our services include

- Nursing
- Personal support
- Specialized services for acquired brain injury, palliative care and diabetes
- Advanced foot care
- Meal preparation
- Homemaking and cleaning
- Companionship
- Specialized child care
- Alzheimer's and Parkinson's care

All of this 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year

INSIDE

Managing type 2 diabetes: Evaluate your risk factors **2**

Your guide to bone health: Protect against osteoporosis **3**

Prevent falls: Practical tips for seniors **4**

Ask our experts **4**



Where peace of mind has a home address™

www.wecare.ca

Managing type 2 diabetes

Type 2 diabetes is one of the fastest growing diseases in Canada. The good news is that this type of diabetes can be prevented or managed through healthy lifestyle choices.

Understanding the condition

Diabetes is a lifelong condition where either your body does not produce enough insulin, or the body cannot use the insulin it produces. The body needs insulin in order to change the sugar from food into energy. If your body does not have insulin or cannot use it properly, the result is a high blood sugar (glucose) level, which can have serious effects.

There are three types of diabetes:

- type 1, where the body makes little or no insulin
- type 2, where the body makes insulin but cannot use it properly
- gestational diabetes

At the present, type 1 diabetes cannot be prevented, and people living with type 1 diabetes depend on insulin to stay alive.

It is estimated that close to two million Canadian adults have diabetes. One third of these people are unaware that they have the disease. Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in Canada, and the cost of diabetes is estimated to be up to \$9 billion a year.

Recognizing symptoms

The classic symptoms of diabetes (type 1 and type 2) are fatigue, frequent urination, unusual thirst, and unexplained weight loss. In type 1 diabetes, the symptoms usually progress quickly and are often dramatic. In type 2, symptoms progress more slowly. However, many people who have type 2 diabetes may have no symptoms. These people may find out they have the condition only when they go to the doctor for another, unrelated problem.

Over time, high blood glucose levels can cause many health-related issues, including

- blindness
- heart disease
- reduced blood supply to the limbs, leading to amputation
- nerve damage
- erectile dysfunction
- stroke

Although no cure is available, diabetes can be managed by medication and/or insulin, and by making healthy lifestyle choices.

Evaluating risk factors

Though there is no single cause of type 2 diabetes, some factors put you at greater risk. They include

- being age 40 or over
- being overweight (especially with abdominal obesity)
- having a family member who has diabetes
- having had gestational diabetes
- high blood pressure

- high cholesterol or other fats in the blood
- member of a high-risk ethnic group

Aboriginal people have three to five times the risk of developing type 2 diabetes than other Canadians. Even Aboriginal children are now being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, a condition that usually occurs in older adults.

Minimizing your risk

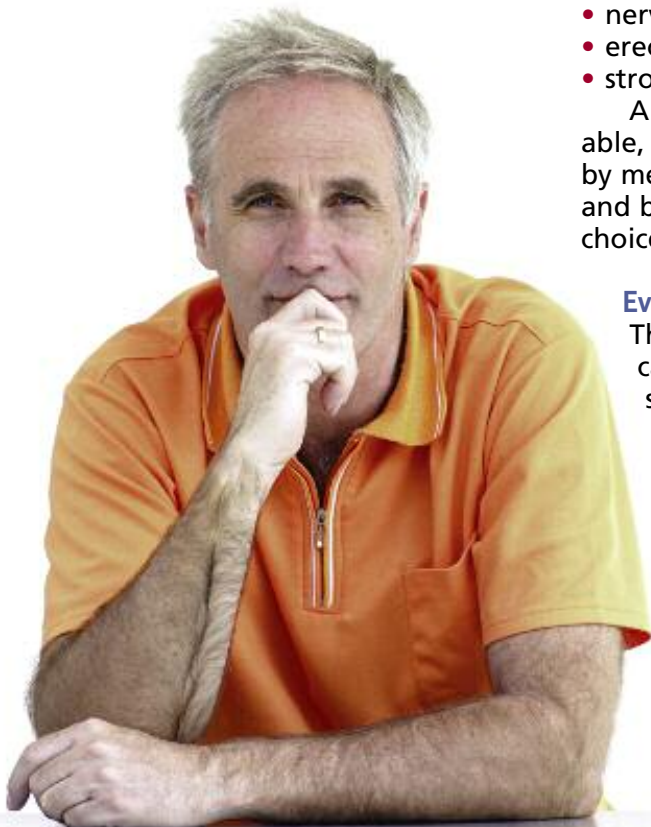
The good news is that type 2 diabetes can be prevented or postponed by taking these measures:

- Don't smoke.
- Achieve a healthy weight and maintain it.
- Be physically active.
- Limit your intake of fat and sugar.
- Eat regular, balanced meals.
- Keep your cholesterol and other blood fats within the target level.
- Maintain a normal blood pressure.

Should you develop type 2 diabetes, you can follow these steps to manage it:

- Take your medication as prescribed.
- Monitor your blood glucose regularly as recommended by your doctor.
- Take care of your feet by examining the skin for redness and sores.
- If you drink alcohol, consume it in moderation. Also, avoid drinking on an empty stomach, which can cause hypoglycemia (low blood glucose).
- Visit your doctor and dentist regularly.
- See an eye specialist as recommended.

Source: "It's Your Health: Type 2 Diabetes," Health Canada. Adapted and Reproduced with the permission of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2008.



Your guide to bone health

Osteoporosis is a disease that makes bones thin and weak. If you have osteoporosis, it means you have less bone (bone density) and the bone you do have is of poorer quality. As a result, your bones can fracture more easily.

One in four women and at least one in eight men over the age of 50 has osteoporosis. No single cause has been found. But some things do seem to increase your chance of developing the disease. If you are over 50 and have one major or two minor risk factors, you should ask your doctor about being tested for osteoporosis.

Major risk factors include

- age 65 or older
- vertebral (spine) compression fracture
- family history of fracture
- long-term (more than three months continuously) use of glucocorticoid drugs such as prednisone
- medical conditions that affect nutrition
- osteopenia (thin bones) showing on an X-ray
- early menopause (before age 45)

Minor risk factors include

- rheumatoid arthritis
- hyperthyroidism
- body weight less than 57 kg (125 lbs)
- low calcium intake
- excess caffeine (more than four cups of coffee or cola a day)
- excess drinking or smoking

Diagnosing osteoporosis

Healthy bones are quite strong. So if you break a bone from a simple fall, it's a warning sign. You need to speak to your doctor.

Fractures of the spine (vertebral fractures) are also common for people with osteoporosis. These fractures "compress" the spine. Often they are not diagnosed and the

pain simply goes away. One of the signs of these types of fractures is losing more than four centimetres of height, or more than six centimetres if you're over age 60. That's why it is important to have your doctor measure your height on a regular basis. If you are losing height, your doctor may order an X-ray to see if you have vertebral fractures.

Osteoporosis is diagnosed using a bone mineral density (BMD) test, which is safe and painless. You will lie on a table for 10 to 20 minutes while a low radiation X-ray measures the density (amount of bone) in your hip, spine or both. Another type of test uses ultrasound to measure the bone density in your heel. This test is not as reliable as a BMD test, so the results should be checked by BMD whenever possible.

Protecting your bones

The good news is that you can take steps to keep your bones strong. These steps include

- quitting smoking
- reducing your caffeine and alcohol intake
- getting the calcium and vitamin D you need
- including regular weight-bearing activity in your life

In addition, your bones need a good supply of calcium to stay strong. Eating a well-balanced diet is the best way to get the calcium you need. Dairy products such as milk, cheese and yogourt are very rich in calcium that is easily absorbed by the body. Other food sources of calcium include tofu made with calcium sulfate, kidney and lima beans, and calcium-fortified drinks.

If you don't eat dairy products or eat them in small amounts, you may need to take a calcium supplement. If you need help planning your meals,

consult a dietitian who can help you find ways to increase the amount of calcium in your diet.

Adapted with permission from Osteoporosis Canada. For more information, call 1-800-463-6842 or visit www.osteoporosis.ca.

Stages of bone formation

- **Building bone:** As children and teenagers, we build the bone that lasts us throughout our life. Our bones are at their strongest (peak bone density) by the time we are young adults.
- **Losing bone:** After our mid-30s, the bone repair process is not as efficient, and we begin to lose bone.
- **Rapid bone loss:** In women, the hormone estrogen helps bones to stay healthy. At menopause, a woman's estrogen levels drop significantly and she usually experiences faster bone loss.

Attention caregivers

Ask for your complimentary copy of *Solutions*®

magazine, courtesy of your local We Care Home Health Services location.

Visit www.wecare.ca or call 1-800-605-0916.





Prevent falls

Individuals with fragile bones are much more likely to break a bone if they fall. Here is some advice to help prevent falls:

- Ask a physiotherapist or occupational therapist to come to your home and advise you on how to reduce hazards that can lead to falls.
- Clear your home of anything that might cause a fall such as scatter rugs, protruding furniture, cords that could trip you up.
- Pets like to stay close. Be careful not to trip over your dog or cat.
- Wear low-heeled shoes that give good support and take care of your feet. Painful feet may affect your ability to stay stable.
- Watch for uneven ground, sidewalks and floors.
- Keep stairs in good repair, free of clutter and well lit.
- Consider your medications (prescription, over-the-counter and herbal) and their potential side effects. Studies suggest that certain medications may increase the risk of falling. For example, an antidepressant may cause a drop in blood pressure and subsequent fainting in some people.
- Stay physically active. Individually tailored exercise programs that include muscle strengthening, balance training, and walking are effective in reducing falls.

Adapted with permission from Osteoporosis Canada

Ask our experts

Forward your questions or comments, and we'll ask our experienced nursing team to provide you with the latest advice and information.

My mother has been living with us for three years. Now, her health is getting worse and her care needs are growing each month. I also have to look after my three young kids. How will I ever manage?

It's wonderful that your mother lives in such a caring home. But I can see the frustration in your last sentence. Life has suddenly become a balancing act. Have you spoken to your mother about the change in her physical abilities? Do you know what her wishes are for the future?

Looking after young children while caring for a parent can be demanding and difficult. Why not contact We Care about hiring a home support worker? A capable, compassionate personal support worker could provide care, light housekeeping and companionship for your mother.

This would free up your time to spend with your children and would turn your time with mom into more of a visit than a task.

My father had a stroke. Since then, he's displayed spells of inappropriate anger. How can I cope?

Make sure everyone around him understands that his anger is the result of the stroke. Avoid getting frustrated as he may not be aware of what he's doing.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation is an excellent resource that can provide infor-

mation as well as listings of local support groups. Either option will give you ideas on how to manage these "spells" of anger. You'll also want to ensure that his doctor is aware so he can rule out any other underlying causes of your father's behaviour.

My 78-year-old aunt insists on gardening and walking to the grocery store each day and wobbling back. Should I intervene?

It's important to help your aunt maintain her level of independence as it is directly related to her well-being. People need to have a sense of control in their lives regardless of their age or level of functioning.

However, you have to consider your aunt's safety and the risk of falls or muscle strains. Having a professional or volunteer caregiver assist your aunt with her shopping and some household tasks may be an excellent way for her to maintain her independence longer in her own home.

You can promote this idea by discussing scenarios with your aunt. For example, if she sustains an injury while carrying grocery bags, the possibility of not being able to do any shopping for herself at all will become very real.

If she has someone to help with the shopping and heavier tasks around her home, however, she can still have independence, input and choice and stay at home longer.

Send your questions to Sue Kelly, RN, PHN, at skelly@wecarecanada.com



Where peace of mind has a home address™

1-800-605-0916
www.wecare.ca