TYPE 2 DIABETES LIFESTYLE MODIFICATIONS

Tips to Help Your Patients Make Necessary Physical Activity and Nutrition Changes
Physical activity and nutrition therapy are at the core of type 2 diabetes treatment because they help manage patients’ glucose, lipids, and blood pressure, and help in weight loss and maintenance. Patients should be made aware that, if they need medications to help manage their type 2 diabetes, those medications should complement lifestyle improvements, not replace them.

Making these lifestyle changes may be challenging for some of your patients with type 2 diabetes. Some may struggle with initiating these changes, while others may find it difficult to maintain their exercise and nutrition programs. Positive, nonjudgmental support from health care providers may help patients’ efforts to make such changes.

**Encouraging Physical Activity**

According to the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) and the American Diabetes Association (ADA) joint position statement on exercise and type 2 diabetes, a combination of aerobic and resistance exercise training may be more effective in improving blood glucose control than either alone. Exercise may also provide additional benefits in patients with type 2 diabetes such as the management of weight loss, lipids, blood pressure, cardiovascular risk, and depression. Despite these benefits, many patients do not engage in physical activity.

Participating in exercise for some of your type 2 diabetes patients may be more challenging due to type 2 diabetes-related complications such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, neuropathy, or microvascular conditions. Your clinical judgment should be the basis of recommending physical activity.

Encouraging patients to choose the forms of physical activity they prefer may help them meet your recommended participation goals. The next page discusses potential recommendations and tips to help patients make and maintain physical activity changes.

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Please note that the recommendations listed are intended as a guide for you and your staff and not meant to direct your clinical discussions or treatment decisions.
ACSM/ADA Physical Activity Recommendations:

- Patients with type 2 diabetes should perform 150 minutes a week of moderate-to-vigorous aerobic exercise over at least 3 days during the week, with no more than 2 consecutive days between aerobic activity sessions.
- Additionally, patients with type 2 diabetes should undertake moderate-to-vigorous resistance training at least 2 to 3 days each week.
- Flexibility training may be added but should not replace other recommended types of physical activity.

Potential Tips to Help With Physical Activity:

- Help design an exercise program based on the activities patients enjoy and to which they are most likely to adhere.
- Consider supervised programs with qualified exercise trainers.
- Engage patients at every visit to gauge how well they are managing their physical activity (e.g., ask about how they are meeting their exercise goals, what is working well, and what is difficult for them).
- Remind patients that exercise is important to managing their type 2 diabetes and can be viewed as treatment.
- Encourage patients to involve family and friends in their exercise for added support.

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MNT for patients with type 2 diabetes promote and support healthy eating patterns in order to help achieve and maintain blood glucose levels, lipids, blood pressure, and body weight goals. Nutrition therapy may also help prevent, or at least slow, the rate of development of the chronic complications of type 2 diabetes. Yet, some patients with type 2 diabetes will struggle with making dietary changes.

Helping patients with type 2 diabetes meet their nutrition-related goals requires a coordinated team effort, with patients involved in the decision-making process. The ADA recommends that a registered dietitian experienced in MNT be the team member who plays the leading role in providing nutrition care. However, it is important that all team members be knowledgeable about MNT and support its implementation.

Addressing individual nutrition needs and taking into account personal and cultural preferences when recommending appropriate nutritional changes may help patients meet their goals. The following are general recommendations and potential tips to help patients make and maintain nutritional changes.

ADA MNT Effectiveness Recommendations:

- Patients with type 2 diabetes should receive individualized MNT; such therapy is best provided by a registered dietitian familiar with the components of diabetes MNT.
- Nutrition counseling should be sensitive to the personal needs, willingness to change, and ability to make changes of the individual with diabetes.

Potential Tips to Help With Nutrition Therapy:

- Consider referral to a registered dietitian.
- Recommend portion control for weight loss and maintenance.
- Remind patients that even modest weight loss may provide clinical benefits.
- Engage patients at every visit to gauge how well they are managing their healthy eating plan (e.g., ask about how they are meeting their goals, what is working well, and what is difficult for them).
- Offer meal-planning approaches such as the plate method.
- Remind patients that healthy eating is important to managing their type 2 diabetes and can be viewed as treatment.
- Encourage patients to involve family and friends in their healthy eating plan for added support.

Encouraging and supporting lifestyle modifications with your patients may help give them the edge they need to feel more in control of their type 2 diabetes.

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References:

This information has been developed by Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc. and made widely available to support patient and provider education.

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August 2014 013814-140416