

# Truths That Will Set You Free

Praveen Kaur Gosal came across the book *50 Diabetes Myths That Can Ruin Your Life and the 50 Diabetes Truths That Can Save It* at the 20th World Diabetes Congress she attended in Montreal last year. The DSS diabetes nurse educator, who believes that one should never stop learning, discusses some of the myths to help you live with and manage diabetes better.

## Common Myths

### **Eating sweets causes diabetes.**

This is a common myth. Eating sweets is not the direct cause of diabetes. Diabetes is caused by genetic predisposition and lifestyle factors. It is caused by insufficient levels of the hormone insulin. Either your pancreas does not produce enough insulin or your body does not respond to the insulin it makes. This term is called insulin-resistance. When you eat too many sweets, they may have contributed to insulin-resistance, a precursor of type 2 diabetes.

### **If I have to go on insulin, it's the beginning of the end.**

Starting insulin is the start of better health. Diabetes is a progressive condition for people who do not control their diabetes, and unfortunately even for some who do. Over a period of time, your body produces less insulin or your ability to use the insulin produced decreases. The initial treatment of type 2 diabetes is diet and exercise and sometimes oral medication. As it progresses, you may require adding one or more pills. As the beta cells degrade, insulin is added. About 40 percent of those with diabetes require the use of insulin. The book mentions that the Joslin Diabetes Clinic in Boston puts their type 2 patients on insulin immediately upon diagnosis because they believe that it provides the greatest control of blood sugars.

## Medical Myths

### **My doctor manages my diabetes, so I don't have to be concerned.**

Your doctor is responsible for your overall care. A day-to-day management of your diabetes is solely up to you. It is your job to do the activities that keep you healthy. In order to manage your diabetes, you have to make decisions about when, what and how much you eat. You must ensure that you do



the recommended hours of exercise a week, take your medication on time and have ample supply. Keep your blood sugar levels within range, do not miss your doctor's appointments and get your lab tests and screening done. It has been proven that those who are in control of their diabetes usually do better than those who do not.

### **If I lose weight and don't require any more medication, I will no longer have diabetes.**

The cure for diabetes has yet to be discovered. Once you have diabetes, you will always have diabetes. "Many people with type 2 diabetes may lower their medication requirement and control their blood glucose well enough to actually discontinue medication by losing about five to 10 percent of their body weight and engaging in regular moderate activity such as walking, swimming, or cycling." With the reduction in weight and regular exercise, insulin resistance is reduced. It allows the body to use the insulin it produces effectively. Well-controlled diabetes does not mean that you are cured. It is important to bear in mind that if you regain your body weight and become sedentary again, the symptoms of diabetes will return.

## **Food Myths**

### **I can't eat anything I like anymore.**

Well, the good news is that you will still be able to eat your favourite foods. The only setback is that you have to watch out for the quantity you eat. Eat smaller portions or indulge less often and modify your favourite foods by replacing the ingredients with healthier options. "You can eat what you want, just not as much as you want."

### **It does not matter what I eat if I "cover" it with my medicine.**

An unhealthy dietary habit increases an individual's risk of diabetic complications even if you take extra medicine or insulin. It may seem sensible to cover an additional consumption of carbohydrates and fat with an extra dose of medicine or insulin. Unfortunately, doing so with any frequency has two negative effects. Firstly, certain medication and insulin can cause weight gain. Thus, by consuming extra calories and increasing your dose of medication or insulin, your chance of gaining weight is doubly increased. Secondly, weight gain increases insulin resistance. As a result, your blood sugar level increases and you may require more medication. Weight gain and insulin resistance can also cause high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

## **Body Fitness Myth**

### **I have to lose a lot of weight for my diabetes to improve.**

Slight reduction in weight can improve your blood sugar, blood pressure, and blood fat levels. It can also reduce your risk of diabetic complications. Numerous benefits are achieved just by losing five to 10 percent of your body weight.

## **Psych Myths**

### **There's nothing good about having diabetes.**

"Many believe that having diabetes is a wake-up call to become healthier and an incentive to find greater meaning and purpose in life." Some of the necessary changes in the lifestyle of someone diagnosed with diabetes should include:

- becoming more active
- reducing the intake of junk food
- consciously watching the quantity of food consumed
- making an effort to lose weight
- quitting cigarette-smoking
- reducing the consumption of alcohol

The author, Riva Greenberg, quoted a 19th-Century English physician and philosopher Sir William Osler who once said, "To live a long and healthy life, develop a chronic disease and take care of it." That is encouraging indeed. So go on...make something good of that something bad today!

*Adapted from "50 Diabetes Myths That Can Ruin Your Life and the 50 Diabetes Truths That Can Save It" by Riva Greenberg. This book is available at major bookstores in Singapore.*



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