

Double Jeopardy: Diabetes and Cancer



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We have all heard the basic public message on diabetes prevention: stop smoking, eat right, be more active. But the better news is that maintaining a healthy lifestyle will prevent you from the risk of cancer as well. The much known complications of diabetes include heart and blood vessel disease, neuropathy, nephropathy, eye and foot damage. However, much less is known about the association between diabetes and cancer.

Epidemiological evidence has, however, suggested that diabetes has been consistently associated with increased risk of several cancers. In a study conducted among Singapore Chinese men and women, it was concluded that diabetes mellitus was a risk factor for colorectal cancer¹.

Colorectal cancer is the leading cancer among males and second leading cancer among females in Singapore². The association was attributed to potential risk factors common to both cancer and diabetes such as ageing, obesity, lack of physical activity, energy-rich diet, alcohol, and smoking¹.

Cancer treatment and Diabetes Control

Chemotherapy and the use of glucocorticoids and steroids can exacerbate difficulties in achieving good diabetes control, particularly after meals. Because of this, chemotherapy doses may need to be reduced and glucocorticoids and steroids doses administered through the day instead of in larger, less frequent doses.

Nausea and vomiting can cause additional control challenges in those with diabetes, particularly if potent anti-hyperglycaemic medication such as insulin is taken.³

Cancer and Metformin

One of the most common types of medication taken for Type 2 diabetes is metformin. It has been commonly linked with lower rates of a wide variety of cancers, especially among people with Type 2 diabetes.

Many different studies have shown evidence that metformin appears to lower the risk of developing cancer as well as increase the survival rates of people with cancer.³

References

1. Diabetes Mellitus and Risk of Colorectal Cancer in the Singapore Chinese Health Study, retrieved May 13, 2015 from <http://jncli.oxfordjournals.org/content/98/2/135.full.pdf+html>
2. Ministry of Health
3. <http://www.diabetes.co.uk/diabetes-complications/diabetes-and-cancer.html>

Coping with Cancer

"I simply cannot cope with this!" How often have you heard a diabetic patient utter these words when they feel completely overwhelmed by managing their condition as well as their professional and domestic responsibilities? Have you ever wondered exactly what that patient meant and how you might help them cope?

Being diagnosed with diabetes can be a very scary thing, and the reactions may vary from denial to depression. Some feel tremendous guilt and shame, or are stricken with uncertainty about the future. Coping strategies can be based on two key areas:

1. **Clinical Management:** One of the biggest challenges for physicians today is addressing the continued needs of patients and increasing treatment compliance. Regular follow-ups and effective communication between doctors and patients contribute to better metabolic control and improve disease outcome.
2. **Self-management and patient education:** This can range from increasing patient awareness of diabetes and its complications, medication, monitoring of blood glucose, practising daily hygiene along with reaching their self-selected goals. This approach not only acknowledges the patients' expertise but also makes them feel committed and empowered.

As both diabetes and cancer are common diseases with tremendous impact on individual's health, it is imperative that both clinicians and patient contribute in acquisition of successful disease coping skills. This will not only lead to positive health outcome and but also improve patients' quality of life.