



Gold Medals can start with a Walk!

By Dr. Peter W. Kujtan, B.Sc., M.D., Ph.D.

With the Olympics ablaze in London, we should all be motivated to start accomplishing those small physical feats, that could benefit our health. Pre-diabetes, is a new term which is linked to inactivity. It is a definition aimed at prevention. Diabetes is a disease that is still an expanding entity in Canada. Many people still believe that it simply means they eat too much sugar. Diabetes refers to the sluggish nature of how our body cells get their fuel. Insulin is a natural peptide hormone produced in our pancreas. I try to think of it as a key that opens the gas tank into our cells. If it fits poorly, then the energy acquiring process slows down. This creates a backlog of sugar along the delivery highways of our blood. Measuring this backlog of sugar in the blood provides one clue to a problem. Without proper energy to burn, your cells fatigue, and with all that sugar floating in blood, more water is needed to prevent sludge, so you get thirsty. Your kidneys work overtime trying to get rid of the excess, and this produces more trips to the water closet. One thing leads to the next and eventually the kidneys filtering all this excess begin to deteriorate.

To prevent diabetes, you need to recognize the early warning signals. If you fast for at least 6 to 8 hours, and your blood sugar is in the 6.1 to 6.9 mmole/L range than it may signal the first signs of a problem. If you suffer from obesity (body mass index 30 or greater), have a family history of diabetes, suffer from high blood pressure or smoke, than you are at risk. Leading a sedentary life style increases this risk. I often have a confounding conversation with people who feel that their eating habits have not changed much since they were 30 but yet seemed to have put on that extra 30 or 60 pounds. It is a simple equation that has held true over the millennia. Obesity is not about gluttony or massive eating behavior. It is about failing to burn small amounts of excess calories on a regular basis. These very small seemingly negligible amounts add up in the long run. A pound every couple of months seems miniscule, but over ten years, it becomes a heavy burden. In our society we seem to love our carbohydrates, because they give us quick energy and are found in foods that don't spoil easily.

There are very few things in medicine that respond amazingly well to a tweak in our behavior, and unfortunately for the pharmaceutical giants, pre-diabetes is one of those entities. EXERCISE! I have witnessed the pre-diabetes state disappear when people start to move more and eat a little differently. Years of sedentary behavior is often cemented behind walls of self-justification. Starting to move more hurts, at first. It aches and needs support from those around us, but the benefit is worth it. Start with a simple walk around the mall or block. If you didn't gain 10 pounds a week, don't expect to lose it fast either. A pedometer measures your activity level, and 5000 steps a day will lead to better health and a new you.

