

PRINT TRANSCRIPT - COVID-19 and its Impact on Diabetes

Managing Disease is Key to Avoiding Complications

The numbers are staggering. According to the American Diabetes Association, 34.2 million Americans, or 10.5 percent of the population, had diabetes two years ago. There are 1.5 million new cases diagnosed every year, and diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States.

Those numbers were concerning before the arrival of COVID-19. Now the pandemic gives those suffering with diabetes an additional worry. Many people severely impacted by this deadly virus have underlying health conditions, including diabetes.

“Patients who have Type One or Type 2 Diabetes, they are not at a higher risk of contracting the virus, but the issue is that if the diabetes is not well managed or under control or if they have other underlying diabetes complications, they are at a higher risk for complications or death from the virus,” said Tanya Munger, nurse practitioner, OSF HealthCare Endocrinology.

Michele Bonzi was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes 34 years ago. She is considered a brittle diabetic, meaning her glucose numbers fluctuate. While she’s struggled with health issues, the arrival of COVID added a new set of worries.

“I think anyone who was chronically ill was terrified only because as other people are going around getting toilet paper, the first thing I thought about was ‘how am I going to get insulin?’” said Michele Bonzi, a diabetes patient. “Am I going to get my diabetic things because things were shutting down so there was a high level of terror.”

While it’s unknown what the exact reason is for serious outcomes in patients with diabetes and COVID-19, people who have diabetes may have compromised immune systems, which can impact their ability to recover quickly from a disease like COVID-19.

“If they already have underlying diabetes-related complications such as heart disease, chronic kidney disease that does have an impact,” said Tanya Munger, nurse practitioner, OSF HealthCare Endocrinology. And if their blood glucose is not in a good healthy range. A good range for our patients is 70 and 180 for their blood glucose readings.

“If you’ve had a long history of uncontrolled diabetes, yes, it can lead to cardiovascular disease, lead to chronic kidney disease, peripheral vascular disease and things of that nature,” said Tanya Munger, nurse practitioner, OSF HealthCare Endocrinology.

Bonzi says she feels more in control of her fears now. She meets with her medical team regularly through tele health visits and face-to-face appointments. While she misses attending social events and spending time with family due to her health concerns, she has advice for other people facing the same struggles.

“Be cautious. Don’t go into large groups. Do what you feel is comfortable for you. But it’s just caution now,” said Michele Bonzi, a diabetes patient. “It’s not that you can’t live. You have to live, but you have to be careful and manage your diabetes and keep your numbers down and definitely stay in contact with your health care providers.”

Munger says she couldn’t agree more.

“One of the things we recommend is they continue to have regular office visits with their provider who’s managing their diabetes, whether it’s endocrinology or primary care team, we want them to continue having those visits whether they’re via telemedicine or face to face,” said Tanya Munger, nurse practitioner, OSF HealthCare Endocrinology. “Keep up on their labs; take their medications as directed and continue to self-monitor at home.”

According to Novo Nordisk, a global healthcare company that specializes in diabetes care, if a diabetic becomes ill, he or she should take the following precautions:

- Call their health care provider
- Check blood sugar every 2-3 hours
- Do not stop taking insulin
- Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated

Medical experts encourage people with diabetes to follow the same precautions as anyone else would to protect themselves and stop the spread of infection:

- Wash hands often
- Wash hands before and after checking blood sugar
- Stay home as much as possible to avoid crowds
- Wear a mask when around others
- Stay in touch with your medical care team

OSF Medical Group offers a comprehensive team approach to diabetes care. For more information about how to manage your diabetes, visit osfhealthcare.org or click [here](#).