

Helping people live well with diabetes

Monday November 3 2008

Nearly one in 20 Canadians has diabetes. That means 5,500 people in our community, knowingly or unknowingly, are living with diabetes.

A diabetes diagnosis can be extremely emotional for patients and their families. The Diabetes Care Program at Headwaters can help alleviate fears and guide patients through the emotional impact and lifestyle changes that accompany a diabetes diagnosis.

Diabetes is a chronic condition in which the body either can not produce insulin (type 1) or can not effectively use the insulin it does produce (type 2). A third type of diabetes is gestational diabetes, which is a temporary condition that occurs in about 3.5 per cent of pregnancies. Undiagnosed or unmanaged, diabetes can lead to severe complications including heart disease, eye disease or kidney disease, among others. If properly diagnosed and carefully managed, people living with diabetes can lead active, normal lives.

"Because of our aging population, sedentary lifestyle and more aggressive screening, the number of people diagnosed with diabetes is expected to increase dramatically within the next several years," says Kathryn MacDonald, certified diabetes educator at Headwaters Health Care Centre.

The Diabetes Care Program has been helping patients in our community for over 20 years. Open to adults and children living with type 1, type 2 diabetes, or women who are experiencing diabetes in pregnancy, the program offers ongoing support, information, counseling and education about diabetes. Headwaters is also one of only 33 programs in the province funded by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care to offer a paediatric diabetes care program.

Led by a team of registered nurses, registered dietitians, physicians, paediatricians and a paediatric social worker, the diabetes care team cover a range of topics including the basics of diabetes, healthy meal planning, being active, understanding medications, managing blood sugar, insulin pump training, stress reduction, preventing complications and coping with chronic illness. Because each patient and their families are unique in their preferences and their abilities, the programs are customized to care for the specific needs and circumstances of each individual in managing their diabetes.

Community-based sessions are also available on a regular basis and include public information forums, grocery tours and pharmacy information days.

"We act as coaches and cheerleaders through listening, reflecting and having respect for people's experiences with diabetes," says Diabetes Educator Jean Booth. "We support choices people with diabetes make in a non-judgmental manner that we hope helps build an ongoing, trusting relationship that enables them to care for their diabetes to the best of their abilities."

Accessing the program

The Diabetes Care Program is offered at both the Orangeville and Shelburne sites. Individuals may self-refer by contacting the program directly at 519-941-2702, ext. 2525 or can be referred by their physician. Patients with a non-urgent condition will receive an appointment within two weeks; urgent patients are seen within two business days.

Patients with pre-diabetes and newly diagnosed with type 2 diabetes can be seen at the Dufferin Area Family Health Team Diabetes Program or at the Mel Lloyd Family Team Diabetes Program in Shelburne at 519-925-0017, ext. 241/223.

November is Diabetes Month

- Pharmacy Information Day at Shoppers Drug Mart in the Orangeville Mall on Thursday, Nov. 6
- Grocery tour at Zehrs on Wednesday, November 19 at 6:30 p.m.
- Pharmacy Information Day at Shoppers Drug Mart, 475 Broadway on Saturday, Nov. 15
- Pharmacy Information Day at Shoppers Drug Mart, 40 Broadway on Thursday, Nov. 27

To learn about upcoming information sessions and activities for people living with diabetes visit www.headwatershealth.ca.

The public is invited to provide comments and suggestions about hospital services. Please contact Cholly Boland, president and CEO, Headwaters Health Care Centre at 519-941-2702, ext. 2200.

Your Health Matters is a column dealing with health and healthy lifestyles in this community, which is submitted by various health-related organizations.