

PUT THE BRAKES ON YOUR DIABETES

By Ankit Ajmera | Jun 9, 2011, 04.47 AM IST

Like many of us, 61-year-old Professor Vijay Joshi was focused at work, didn't have time for exercise and indulged himself with all kinds of food. That is until he was diagnosed with diabetes 11 years ago.

A retired professor in psychometrics for a renowned banking institute, Joshi did not show any symptoms of the disease before that. He had just turned 50 and his family forced him to go for a routine medical check-up. Before this he had no clue that he was ailing with Type 2 diabetes.

"My work was hectic and stressful," he says. "After checking my blood sugar level, the doctor told me that hypertension, low activity levels, an unhealthy diet and excess body weight (especially around the waist) over the years, had led to the disease."

A physiological condition where muscle cells react abnormally to the insulin produced by the body, diabetes is a result of blood sugar not getting into cells to be stored as energy.

The initial stages

Being diagnosed with a lifestyle disease was shocking for Joshi. "The thought that I won't be able to eat any sweets bore heavily on me," he says. "I was in my pre-diabetic stages.

I had some hope that I could still control the situation with regular exercise and diet changes." Joshi's blood sugar figures were found to be 131 and 204 mg/dl before and after the meals respectively. For a normal person, the sugar levels range between 100 and 140.

He was put on allopathic medicine which helped his cells absorb insulin and kept his blood sugar level in check. "I started exercising regularly and it really helped in bringing down the sugar level in my body. This was the time I thought I had it under control," he says.

But, his condition got worse a couple of years later, when his cholesterol and triglyceride levels shot up to 240 and 299 mg/dl respectively.

The normal range for cholesterol is 36-165 mg/dl and triglyceride is between 15-250 mg/dl. "I was under the assumption that I would become fine very soon," he says. "So I took it easy and started skipping exercise and medicines."

As a result, his sugar levels shot up again. "Every three months I had to go to the doctor for a check up. I started fearing what the doctor will have to say about my condition now."

He learned of the horrors of diabetes and how it interferes with the functioning of vital organs including, failure of kidneys, damage to heart, eyes and in extreme cases nerve disorders leading to the amputation. Realising this, he never skipped medication again.

What changed his life

The doses of medicine kept on increasing as the years passed by. He started with half a tablet of insulin per day and it increased to one and a half tablets by 2009.

“This bothered me a lot as I thought the medicines might start causing side-effects in my body as I age,” he says. “I started looking for a solution.”

One day he came across an article in Mirror dated December 1, 2009, titled ‘Diabetes isn’t a One Way Street’.

The article featured an interview with an American physician, researcher and author Dr Neal Barnard. His book titled Dr Neal Barnard’s Program for Reversing Diabetes, depicted ways in which diabetics could get rid of medication simply by switching to a healthy diet.

“It seemed quite logical the way it was written. I did some research on the internet about the book. I came across an organisation called SHARAN which was working on the principles of Dr Barnard in India, teaching people to adapt to a plant-based diet.”

Time to conquer

Joshi got in touch with the organisation and attended a workshop organised in the city at the beginning of 2010. He learned that he has to get refined oil in his diet and have only ‘whole food diet’.

For instance, he switched from white rice to brown rice. Brown rice is full of fibre and not processed, the body takes time to digest it. Therefore, glucose is reduced gradually which makes it easy to be absorbed by the insulin-resistant muscle cells.

Eating fruits and not juice and vegetables such as cucumber without peeling them also helps.

Since he is a vegetarian, he figured that his cholesterol was the result of milk products that he loved to eat, such as cow’s milk, paneer, rasgullas, laddoos and other milk sweets. He went off milk. Secondly, he had to replace the refined oil in his diet with something natural.

His present diet

Joshi has given up milk and its products completely. He doesn’t even have biscuits because they contain milk powder. “People fear that when you stop milk, the calcium content in your body may go down drastically,” he says. “But there are lot of other ways to substitute calcium, such as raw apples, pomegranate, soybean and dry fruits.”

His tea is milk free and his vegetables are cooked in non-refined til oil or sesame oil which is also rich in calcium. But most of the times he avoids using any sort of cooking oil. As we met him at his residence during the lunch hour, he is cooking cauliflower sabzi with rai, jeera and haldi in plain water.

“I drink the water as soup once the vegetable is cooked,” he says, not feeling any regret that it doesn’t taste as great as regular food. His evening snacks such as cutlets are made of vegetables such as carrots, sprouts and beans instead of potatoes. And they are not fried but steamed.

He ensures that he takes a brisk walk for 3.5 kilometres every day in the morning for 35-40 minutes after a short warm-up session.

However, he faces a problem with food when he steps out of his house. “This is something I cannot help. If I am in a restaurant with my family I usually order fruits, salads or something non-oily like idlis,” he says.

Also organic food which is free from chemical fertilizers is not available at local departmental stores. So he travels to few selected malls in the city which stock the same.

“It takes a lot of courage to refrain from the way you have been used to eating what you eat. But the desire to live long and healthy makes you change your ways,” he adds. “I know one of my relatives who are trying the Chinese acupuncture technique to get of the medication for their diabetes.

But I find it funny because unless you modify your intake, nothing is going to happen. Nowadays a lot of people tell me that ‘you have lost weight’. I tell them that I have lost weight but I have also lost my diabetes,” he laughs.

His present blood sugar level recorded in the month of May 2011 is in the normal range of 89-120 mg/dl before and after meals respectively. Today he is able to enjoy mangoes of the season, which he couldn’t do two years ago.

Sharan is conducting a workshop on getting rid of diabetes on June 19 from 9 am to 5.30 pm. The venue is Times Tower, 6th floor, Kamala Mills Compound, Lower Parel, Mumbai

Joshi's recipe for No diabetes

- » One cup hot water or tulsi tea without milk
- » Breakfast includes two chapattis and curry
- » Between lunch and breakfast he has fruits such as banana and mango
- » For lunch he has brown rice with salads, curry and raw vegetables like beat root, bhindi, and pumpkin. He uses rock salt instead of normal salt
- » Steamed vegetable cutlets for evening snacks
- » Brown rice or 1 and a half chapatti with vegetables like karela or beans cooked in Til oil
- » Do a basic warm-up followed by a walk for 3.5 kilometres every day in the shortest time possible (Because he is off animal food, he has vitamin B12 tablets as supplements additionally.)

GALLERIES

**Booked for the screen Ready for a rewind... Nation bids tearful
adieu to ... Cornered**