



Metabolic Syndrome and Type 2 Diabetes

Unfortunately, the risk of diabetes is great for people living with mental illness, especially those taking second-generation atypical antipsychotic medications (SGAs). People also need to be aware of metabolic syndrome, a condition that can be a precursor to diabetes, also known as pre-diabetes. Left untreated, these two conditions can cause severe health problems and can shorten lives.

Are You at Risk?

- People living with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder or other mood disorders have a genetic risk for diabetes that is greater than the general population
- People taking SGAs have increased risks for weight gain, diabetes and metabolic syndrome; some medications offer greater risks than others
- African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and Asian Americans carry higher risks for diabetes
- Smokers have higher rates of diabetes and metabolic syndrome; smokers tend to be unable to manage diabetes as well as nonsmokers and often have more diabetes-related complications
- Family history of diabetes and metabolic syndrome increases risk
- Being overweight, especially around your waist, increases risk

Diabetes

Diabetes is a problem related to how your body uses sugar. It is a serious medical problem. There are several types of diabetes—we will focus on the adult-onset type, also called Type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes results from cells in a person's body failing to use insulin properly. Insulin enables cells in the body to use glucose (a kind of sugar) to turn it into energy. In Type 2 diabetes, the rising glucose levels seen in the bloodstream are an indicator that the body is not using insulin well. Being overweight, especially around the middle and abdomen area, is the

most common underlying cause of adult-onset diabetes. Having a family history of adult-onset diabetes is another risk. By becoming more active and engaging in a weight-loss program, you may be able to halt and even reverse adult-onset diabetes. Talk with your health care provider before beginning an exercise program.

Symptoms

Type 2 diabetes can exist in a person for years before it is identified. The most common symptoms of undetected diabetes are increased thirst and urination. Fatigue is also common. Other signs include dry and itchy skin, blurry vision and slowly healing wounds. If you notice any of these symptoms, it is important to get your sugar (glucose) level checked when you see your health care provider. A simple blood test will tell you if you are either at risk for, or if you have, Type 2 diabetes.

Managing Type 2 Diabetes

Regular exercise and a healthy diet need to be part of your lifestyle. Because some medications offer greater risks than others, it is imperative that you talk with your health care provider about the relationship between your medicines and your diabetes.

Ask your doctor to get a longer-term measure of your sugar control—called a HgbA1c (pronounced hemoglobin A one C). This will give you an overview of your diabetes control over the last few months. This can help to inform your future efforts. In general, a reading of seven or lower is considered healthy.

Metabolic Syndrome

Metabolic syndrome is a combination of medical-risk issues. These issues include worsening sugar control, high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol and other problems. Metabolic syndrome raises risk for diabetes and heart disease and can be thought of as a condition that precedes diabetes.

Waist circumference is a key measure for metabolic syndrome. A waist circumference greater than 40 inches in men and 35 inches in women should be avoided.

There is evidence that this is a real issue for people living with mental illness—the syndrome is common in both men and in women and is more common for those who take SGAs. Walking (and other exercise), nutrition and working with your health care provider to monitor your progress are important steps to managing and preventing metabolic syndrome.

Self Advocacy

A very troubling fact is that most people living with mental illness and metabolic syndrome or Type 2 diabetes are not getting good preventive or medical care. Even though they are trained as medical doctors, sometimes psychiatrists don't consider medical problems to be a core aspect of their responsibility. Conversely, some internists manage diabetes everyday but do not appreciate the increased risk of people living with mental illness or the risks associated with the use of SGAs. People can find themselves caught between the two systems with a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, resulting in fragmented care. This problem may be improving; integration efforts are growing, but it is not likely to change quickly. We have a long way to go before excellent medical care for individuals living with mental illness is routine.

Managing Your Weight

A combination of exercise and nutrition can make a great difference in many cases. There are many efforts springing up around the nation.

Check your local clubhouse, NAMIWalks or community mental health program. You may find a walking group, a nutritional and fitness group or peer support that can help you. There is not one easy answer to these issues—the key is to find what supports and actions are right for you.

Tools and Tips



- Peertrainer.com is a Web site devoted to helping people manage their weight. This can directly contribute to improved management of pre-diabetic and diabetic conditions.
- Weight Watchers has some positive data around weight management and weight loss. This can be challenging for people who have social anxiety, but many individuals with psychiatric conditions have also succeeded in this program. www.weightwatchers.com
- Work with your health care provider to know what to watch, typically your weight and your triglycerides. These are the first areas of concern for people taking SGAs.
- The American Diabetes Association has a wealth of information on the topic of diabetes, from research to recipes. www.diabetes.org

NAMI Hearts & Minds program is an online, interactive, educational initiative promoting the idea of wellness for individuals living with mental illness. This Fact Sheet is offered for informational purposes only. It does not intend to recommend specific treatment or strategies. Individuals should always engage with their health care provider before addressing diabetes.

This project was made possible with support from Optum Health Public Sector and the Smoking Cessation Leadership Center-University of California. NAMI does not endorse or promote any specific medication, treatment, product or service.

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For more information about metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes, or the NAMI Hearts & Minds program visit

