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Knowledge About Type 2 Diabetes for Family Members and Caregivers: What Should They Know?

Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) is a chronic and complex disease that affects millions of people worldwide. Managing T2DM requires not only commitment from the individual with diabetes but also support from their family and social environment. Family members and caregivers play a vital role in

the daily life of a person with T2DM, providing care with glucose self-monitoring, medication management, diet, and encouraging physical activity. Additionally, the burden of the disease, which involves constant decision-making, can impact family relationships and lead to emotional and psychological challenges.

In this article, we will analyze the essential knowledge that family members and caregivers should have about T2DM to provide adequate support and promote better diabetes management in everyday life.

Through therapeutic education with a structured educational plan that meets standards defined by scientific societies, we can address the needs of both the person with T2DM and their family members and caregivers.

For family members and caregivers, understanding the basic aspects of type 2 diabetes is essential to provide proper support. Diabetes education can improve glycemic control in individuals with T2DM and reduce the risk of complications. According to a study by Powers et al. (2016), diabetes education helps individuals with T2DM and their caregivers make informed decisions about disease management, leading to a better quality of life and reduced hospitalizations.

In addition to basic education about diabetes, caregivers should learn about the symptoms of hyperglycemia (high blood sugar levels) and hypoglycemia (low blood sugar levels), which may include confusion, sweating, palpitations, headaches, or irritability. Early knowledge of these symptoms is key to preventing severe complications, such as diabetic coma—a potentially serious condition that can result in loss of consciousness due to glucose imbalance (Powers et al., 2016).

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIET IN DIABETES MANAGEMENT

Nutrition plays a crucial role in the management of T2DM. Caregivers and family members should understand the importance of a balanced diet low in refined carbohydrates to help maintain stable blood glucose levels. The Mediterranean diet, rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats, has proven effective in managing T2DM (Evert et al., 2019).

It is essential that caregivers support individuals with T2DM in meal planning and selecting appropriate foods. Family members can help by avoiding processed or high-sugar foods at home and promoting homemade meals instead of ultra-processed or restaurant foods. This not only helps individuals

with T2DM maintain glucose control but also encourages healthy eating habits for the entire family.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Regular physical activity is fundamental in T2DM management, as it improves insulin sensitivity and helps maintain a healthy weight. Family members can play an active role by encouraging and accompanying individuals with T2DM in activities such as daily walks, resistance exercises, or physical activity classes adapted to their needs and abilities. According to the American Diabetes Association (ADA), at least, 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week is recommended for individuals with T2DM (ADA, 2024).

In addition to physical benefits, exercise has a positive impact on mental health, which is crucial since many individuals with T2DM experience anxiety or depression due to the chronic nature of the disease (Huang et al., 2021). Therefore, engaging in activities together can improve both the physical and emotional well-being of individuals with T2DM.

SELF-MONITORING AND BLOOD GLUCOSE CONTROL

Regular self-monitoring of blood glucose levels is one of the most important responsibilities in caring for a person with T2DM. Caregivers should learn to use glucose monitoring devices and understand the appropriate glucose ranges for each individual with T2DM, which are generally between 80 mg/dL and 130 mg/dL fasting and < 180 mg/dL after meals (ADA, 2020).

Additionally, caregivers should be aware of any unusual changes in glucose levels that may require medication adjustments or a medical consultation. Frequent monitoring allows both the individual with T2DM and their family members to identify patterns and triggers that may affect glucose levels, such as stress, certain foods, or lack of exercise.

ADHERENCE TO PHARMACOLOGICAL TREATMENT

T2DM may require oral drugs, insulin, or a »

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» combination of both to keep blood glucose levels within target range. Family members and caregivers should be familiar with the individual's medication regimen, including dosages, schedules, and potential side effects. Lack of adherence to treatment is often one of the main challenges in the management of diabetes. A study by Chrvala et al. (2016) highlights that family support can significantly increase adherence to treatment, as supervision and accompaniment reduce the risk of missing doses or taking medication incorrectly.

EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

T2DM is a disease that can have a significant emotional impact on both the individual with T2DM and their family members. The burden of the disease, fear of complications, and lifestyle restrictions can lead to mental health issues such as depression or anxiety. In this context, emotional support from family members and caregivers is vital for the overall well-being of individuals with T2DM.

Caregivers must recognize that T2DM affects not only the body but also the mind and emotions. A supportive environment in which individuals with T2DM feel understood and not judged is essential for motivation to adhere to treatment (Lloyd et al., 2018).

Additionally, caregivers should take care of their own emotional health to prevent burnout, known as "caregiver burnout." This exhaustion can negatively affect their relationship with the individual with T2DM and the quality of care provided. Participation in support groups or consulting mental health professionals can be highly beneficial for maintaining emotional stability for both caregivers and family members.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND CAREGIVERS

Support of family members and caregivers is fundamental for the proper management of T2DM. Some practical recommendations include:

- **Diabetes Education:** Caregivers should »

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- » educate themselves about diabetes to better understand the challenges faced by individuals with T2DM and how to support them effectively.
- **Support in Blood Glucose Monitoring:** Learning to use glucose measurement devices and assisting individuals with T2DM in keeping a record of their levels can be helpful.
- **Encouraging an Exercise Routine:** Motivating individuals with T2DM to engage in physical activity according to their abilities is important for glucose control.
- **Healthy Meal Preparation:** Planning and preparing balanced meals can facilitate adherence to a healthy diet.
- **Stress Management:** Stress can raise blood glucose levels, so helping individuals with T2DM find activities that promote relaxation, such as meditation, can be beneficial. **D**

CONCLUSIONS

The role of family members and caregivers in managing T2DM is fundamental. Through education on aspects such as nutrition, physical activity, blood glucose self-monitoring, pharmacological treatment, and emotional support, families can significantly contribute to the well-being and quality of life of individuals with T2DM.

T2DM requires comprehensive care, and the family environment plays a crucial role in motivating and encouraging self-care. With proper knowledge and a mutual support approach, family members and caregivers can facilitate the effective management of this chronic disease, helping individuals with T2DM face challenges and reduce the risk of complications.

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