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The Health Advisor

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Diabetes is a major health problem in the southwest Bronx. According to the city's Department of Health, the Highbridge-Morrisania community has one of the highest rates of diabetes in all of New York City - meaning if you don't have diabetes yourself you probably know a family member, friend, or neighbor that does.

Poorly managed diabetes can lead to a host of painful, costly, and burdensome health problems. Keeping blood sugar levels as close to normal as possible, as consistently as possible, is the best way to prevent complications like heart disease, kidney disease, and problems with vision and circulation.

Is your diabetes under control? You don't know for sure unless you know your numbers.

First, get an idea of what your blood sugar levels are on a daily basis. Did you know that many people with diabetes do not experience symptoms of high blood sugar? Just because you feel fine doesn't mean your blood sugar is in control. It's important to self-test everyday - even a few times a day - so you know where you stand.

If you test in the morning when you wake up or before you eat a meal, shoot for a level of 80-120 mg/dl. If you test after eating, wait two hours so your food has time to digest and become absorbed into your blood. You want your blood sugar level to be less than 180 mg/dl when you test two hours after eating. If you do not have a glucometer (a meter you can use at home to measure your blood sugar levels) or you do not know how to use your meter, contact your doctor or call the number listed on the meter for more information and/or instructions.

Second, be sure to keep track of your average blood sugar levels with a hemoglobin A1C test. This test, often pronounced "A one C" for short, estimates your average blood sugar level during the previous two to three months; so, it is a good way for you and your doctor to gauge how well your diabetes is being managed.

A person with diabetes should shoot for an A1C result of 7 percent or less. A result of 8 percent or higher means that your diabetes is not as controlled as it should be and that you, your doctor, and a nutritionist need to discuss a new diabetes management plan.

Every person with diabetes should have an A1C test done every 3 to 6 months. Do you know when your last A1C test was? Do you know what your result was? If not, ask your doctor at your next appointment. Remember, in order to manage your diabetes, you need to know your numbers!