

1. *Does the risk of diabetes increase with age? Are the symptoms different?*

As people get older, their risk for diabetes increases. However the trend is slowly changing and diabetes is increasing in women in the 40-60 age group. Diabetes may present with weight loss, increased thirst, frequent urination [ day or night or both] and increased appetite, tiredness, vaginal infections, sleepiness, burning of feet etc. There may be no symptoms in many. Some symptoms may be ignored by seniors as part of aging. It is important to discuss with your doctor any new symptom.

2. *Are there different diagnostic methods or cut offs for people over the age of 65?*

The diagnostic criteria are the same for all age groups. The diagnostic method is the same. Diabetes can be diagnosed only with blood sugar testing at this time. Fasting sugar greater than 126 mgm%, HbA1c greater than 6.5, 2 hours post 75 gm glucose value greater than 200 are all diagnostic of diabetes. Women with symptoms of diabetes and a random value greater than 200 mgm% is also diagnostic of diabetes.

3. *Are there greater risks of diabetes in seniors?*

Aging increases the risk of hypertension, heart disease, stroke, cognitive decline and bone loss. Diabetes may compound these problems and pose additional risks. Decline in vision, coordination and hearing may increase chances of falling and fractures. Poor appetite and cognitive decline may make risk of hypoglycaemia greater.

4. *Are the targets for seniors different [for diabetes control, BP control and cholesterol control]*

The recommended targets are the same. However, the targets can be relaxed based on age, other medical conditions, quality of life issues and support systems available. Less tight control can help prevent hypoglycaemia in seniors. However this has to be individualized.

5. *Are there special dietary needs or recommendations for seniors?*

Seniors may tend to eat less than in their younger years. Also they may be less physically active and the caloric needs may therefore be lower. Poorly fitting dentures or lack of teeth may make chewing difficult for some. Taste may also change. The diet should be balanced and meet the calorie needs, supplemented with adequate vitamins, minerals and calcium [ through diet and when indicated with supplements] Small frequent meals, adequate protein and fruits, vegetables and dairy will provide the needed nutrients.

6. *Does menopause affect women's risk for diabetes or heart disease?*

Menopause is a time of great change both physically, metabolically and psychologically.

Weight gain may be more upper body and there may be unfavourable changes in lipid profile. The decrease in estrogen and relative rise in androgens also increases the risk for heart disease.

Women normally have 10 year advantage over men in terms of heart disease. The presence of diabetes removes that protection. Menopause also causes mood changes and depression and this may worsen glucose control or increase risk for cognitive decline. Hot flashes may be mistaken for low sugar symptoms. Genitourinary atrophy may increase risk of urinary tract infection.

7. *What is the best physical activity for senior women?*

Women should be active throughout their life. Menopause lowers their metabolic rate and weight gain is a real challenge for many women. The best activities are anything that will be sustainable, does not increase risk of fractures and that will help build muscle strength. Walking, water aerobics, swimming, upper body ergometrics are all helpful. It is really important to follow fall prevention precautions.

8. *How can senior women keep their mind active and prevent dementia?*

It is very important for seniors to keep themselves mentally active. This can be done through conversations and spending time with family and friends. Getting involved in doing puzzles, cross word, Sudoku, reading, watching television and practising mindfulness and meditation.

Eating a balanced diet, being physically active and doing things that make them happy and relaxed will help with maintaining good cognitive abilities.

9. *Are there medications that need to be avoided by senior women?*

Sleeping pills or any anti anxiety or anti depressants must be used with caution. Certain medications may increase bone loss and increase the risk of fractures. Certain medications may increase chances of weight gain.

10. *How can senior women help their family and other women in the community stay healthy?*

Women are always strong in terms of supporting their families and being care givers. As mothers, they are the backbone of the family, attending to all the needs of the children, their spouse and the elders in the family. As grandmothers they are an enormous source of love and support and a treasure trove of recipes and stories. Many seniors continue to work and bring their experience and expertise to the work force. By sharing their knowledge, leading by example and insisting on healthy cooking and physical activity at home, they can profoundly influence others.