

SENIOR FITNESS

Diminishing the Complications of Diabetes

**By
Jim Evans**

DEAR JIM: My husband was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes last year, but he doesn't seem to be taking it very seriously. His doctor recommended that he lose weight, start exercising, and watch his eating habits, but so far he hasn't done any of these things. He was supposed to stop smoking too, but he says cigars "don't count." I'm at my wits end because he won't listen to his doctor, and he won't listen to me, and I'm afraid I'm going to be a widow before you know it. What can I do to get him to understand that ignoring his problem isn't going to make it go away? By the way, he's only 68, so he's still relatively young. **WORRIED IN WOOSTER**

DEAR WORRIED: You said it yourself – ignoring his problem will NOT make it go away. Your husband is playing a dangerous game with his life because diabetes is NOT something to take lightly. Perhaps some cold, hard facts will wake him up to the reality of his situation:

According to the American Diabetes Association (www.diabetes.org), diabetes is the fifth-deadliest disease in the U.S. - more than 200,000 people will die from diabetes and its complications this year. More than 65% of diabetics will die of heart disease or stroke – 2-4 times more likely than someone without diabetes. Each year 12,000-24,000 people lose their sight because of diabetes, and it is the leading cause of new blindness in people 20-74 years of age. The risk of leg amputation is 15-40% greater for diabetics, and more than 82,000 people lose a foot or leg every year to the disease. Diabetics over 65 years of age are also twice as likely to be hospitalized for kidney infections, and diabetic nephropathy is the leading cause of kidney failure. Perhaps this will help him get the picture.

A study sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) – the Diabetes Prevention Program – showed that lifestyle changes such as exercise, weight loss, and smoking cessation can significantly delay and even prevent diabetes. These same lifestyle changes are equally important in the treatment of diabetes for controlling glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels. And, you can tell your husband that – yes – cigars DO count. Cigars contain a larger content of carcinogenic tars than cigarettes, and a higher amount of nicotine is absorbed through the oral mucous membranes than via a cigarette increasing the risk of dental disease and head and neck cancers in addition to circulation problems already precipitated by diabetes.

Managing diabetes – like any other serious health problem – is largely a matter of personal responsibility, and if your husband does not take responsibility for his own health, he will very likely pay a steep price for his immaturity and join thousands of other older diabetics who persist in ignoring common sense and greatly diminish their quality of life in their later years. It won't be pretty. If he won't change his lifestyle for himself, ask him if he will do it for his family. He owes you at least that much.

Jim Evans is a 38-year veteran of the health and fitness industry and a nationally recognized consultant on fitness for seniors. He is chairman of the advisory council for the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of San Diego County and host of the popular radio talk show “Forever Young” on San Diego’s KCBQ 1170 AM (KCBQ.com).