

THE SILENT DANGER of pre-diabetes—and how to fight it

Diabetes has become a familiar word in nearly every household. With changing diets, sedentary lifestyles, and rising stress levels, more people are being diagnosed every year; many others find themselves teetering on the edge of it. Being pre-diabetic means your blood sugar levels are higher than normal, but not high enough to be classified as diabetes.

It's a warning sign — but also an opportunity. With the right changes, this stage can often be reversed.

As Dr Mashfiqul Hasan, Assistant Professor of Endocrinology and current PhD researcher at Bangladesh Medical University, states, "For people who are in the 'borderline' zone, lifestyle changes can play a significant role in delaying or even preventing the onset of diabetes."

He explains that this begins with something as simple — and as challenging — as rethinking what's on your plate.

The Bangladeshi diet is often heavy on rice, oil, and sugar — comforting but problematic for blood sugar control. Hasan emphasizes that reducing

carbohydrate intake, particularly from refined sugars, and

increasing fibre consumption through fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can make a substantial difference.

While cutting out on sweets and soft drinks may seem obvious, a bigger challenge lies in moderating the hidden carbs. "We should also limit calorie-dense foods like biryani, tehari, beef, mutton, fast food, and soft drinks, as they negatively impact weight management," states Hasan.

A healthier choice would be complex carbs found in brown rice or whole wheat, which release energy more slowly and help maintain stable blood sugar levels. Lean proteins like chicken, eggs, lentils, and fish, along with fats from sources such as nuts or olive oil, can help balance meals and keep you fuller for longer.

For those who think that skipping sugar alone will keep diabetes at bay, Hasan clarifies, "Cutting sugar is a good start, but it's not enough. Managing how much and what kind of carbohydrate you eat is just as important."

Exercise doesn't have to mean hitting the gym or running marathons. A brisk walk in the park or even regular household chores can do wonders. Hasan encourages people to move more throughout the day — take the stairs, walk short distances instead of taking a rickshaw, and avoid sitting for long hours.

Stress and lack of sleep can also elevate blood sugar levels. Chronic stress raises cortisol, which interferes with insulin function. Even simple habits like maintaining a sleep

schedule, reducing screen time, and practicing relaxation techniques can make a difference.

For someone at risk, Hasan recommends checking blood sugar levels at least every few months. "If these changes are sustained, they can prevent or at least delay the need for medication," he says.

If diabetes is common in your family, you may already have a higher risk — but that doesn't mean it's inevitable. Hasan points out that family history does play a significant role, but genetics alone does not guarantee that someone will develop diabetes.

According to Hasan, it's often the urban lifestyle — sedentary work, irregular meals, and reliance on processed food — that pushes genetically vulnerable individuals over the edge.

He puts it beautifully: "It is not necessary for the story to be written by genetics; the story can be written by each person themselves."

The tricky part about diabetes is that it can progress silently. Some early signs may appear even when blood sugar levels are still within the 'normal' range. One of the first red flags is unexplained weight gain, especially around the abdomen. "This is often an indicator of insulin resistance," Hasan notes.

For women, symptoms like menstrual irregularities or increased facial or body hair can also signal hormonal imbalance linked to excess insulin. Another subtle clue is dizziness after meals — a sign that your body may be producing too much insulin to manage the sugar from food.

Persistent fatigue and mental fog — feeling tired even after rest, or struggling to focus — can also point toward early metabolic dysfunction.

While pre-diabetes can often be managed through diet and lifestyle, it's important to know when to get medical support. If you've made consistent lifestyle changes but still experience symptoms, or if blood sugar readings remain borderline for several months, it's time to consult a physician. An endocrinologist can assess your insulin sensitivity and suggest early interventions through proper diagnosis.

Ignoring symptoms or delaying medical check-ups can lead to full-blown diabetes, which brings complications affecting the heart, kidneys, eyes, and nerves. Hasan stresses the importance of regular follow-up: "Regular check-ups and keeping an eye on your blood sugar are very important, especially for those with a family history."

As Dr Mashfiqul Hasan reminds us, "Lifestyle changes can delay or even prevent diabetes if they are sustained." It's a message of both caution and hope: diabetes may run in the family, but with awareness and action, it doesn't have to run your life.

By Nusrath Jahan
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