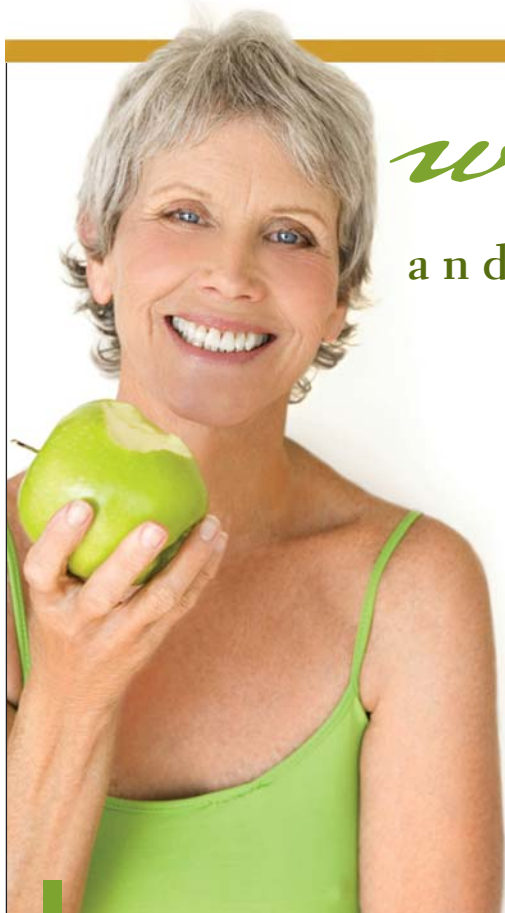


women and DIABETES



It is the first Thursday of the month at 2:00 pm, and the conference room in Southern Ocean County Hospital's Family Resource Center is completely full. This familiar scene plays out each month, as dozens of people come together to attend SOCH's Diabetes Support Group, an open forum where participants can share their concerns and learn how to cope with and successfully manage their disease.

Barbara Zemaitis, RN, coordinator of the SOCH Diabetes Self-Management Program, who facilitates the group, answers the participant's questions with the expertise that comes from years of experience helping people with diabetes. She can't emphasize enough how important it is for people with diabetes to learn as much as they can about the disease, so that they can improve their quality of life and avoid dangerous complications.

"One thing that many people do not know is that the risks of complications differ between women and men," said Barbara, who cites a troubling statistic. "Approximately 9 million women in the United States have diabetes, and nearly one third of them are not even aware that they have the disease."

According to SOCH Endocrinologist **Sajjad Hussain, MD**, medical director of the Diabetes Self-Management Program at SOCH, diabetes is a disease that affects the body's ability to produce or respond to insulin, a hormone that allows blood glucose (blood sugar) to enter the cells of the body and be used for energy. Diabetes falls into two main categories, Type 1, which is less common, usually occurs during childhood. Type 2 diabetes is usually diagnosed after the age of 45.

"Women diabetics, in particular, have a greater risk for developing cardiovascular disease," said Dr. Hussain. "In fact, deaths from heart disease in women with diabetes have increased 23 percent over the past 30 years, compared to a 27 percent decrease in women without diabetes."

In addition, says Dr. Hussain, women with diabetes are over seven times more likely to develop peripheral vascular disease than women without diabetes."

The good news is, women can significantly reduce their risk of these complications by taking advantage of the comprehensive education and support services provided by the SOCH Diabetes Self-Management Program, which is recognized by the American Diabetes Association as meeting the national standards for diabetes education.

"Our diabetes educators provide individual counseling to patients and their loved ones on how lifestyle changes such as diet and exercise, can help them control their disease," explained Barbara. "We also help patients understand how their medication works, teach them how to monitor their blood sugar, and explain their risk of complications such as heart disease, eye disorders, kidney disease, nerve damage and wounds that won't heal."

One of the keys to successful disease management is to recognize that all diabetics are different. "Diabetes is a very personal disease," said Barbara. "Our diabetes educators work to develop a diabetes self-management program that

meets the individualized needs of each patient, based on their age, school or work schedule, daily activities, family demands, eating habits and health problems. In fact, we encourage participation from the whole family.

How well does diabetes education work? The results speak for themselves. Time and again, Barbara has seen her patients successfully control their blood sugar levels, thanks to participation in the Diabetes Self-Management Program.



In addition to individual and family counseling, the Diabetes Self-Management Program includes:

- Blood sugar monitoring
- Medical nutritional therapy
- Exercise classes
- Education and support programs
- Nutritional consultations
- Diabetes foot screenings
- Safe Syringe Disposal Program

The diabetes self-management team at SOCH includes certified diabetes educators, registered nurses, dietitians, pharmacists, podiatrists and fitness instructors who specialize in diabetes self-management training. This team of healthcare professionals works closely with physicians to help patients manage their disease safely and effectively.

For more information about the *Diabetes Self-Management Program* at SOCH, or to schedule an appointment with a *Diabetes Educator*, call SOCHConnect, at 609-978-3400.