K-State’s popular Dining with Diabetes program to launch ‘email challenge’

Free program will help ease anxiety toward costly disease

MANHATTAN, Kan. – In 2020, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that 34.2 million Americans are living with diabetes. More than 1 in 3 – or 88 million more – adults have pre-diabetes, or a condition that indicates a person has a higher than normal blood sugar level.

So, it’s not a stretch to say there is anxiety toward a disease that costs Americans more than $327 billion in medical costs and lost work productivity annually.

“We know that a diagnosis of diabetes can be scary and overwhelming to folks,” said Gayle Price, program director for Kansas State University’s Dining with Diabetes program, and an extension specialist at the Southeast Kansas Research-Extension Center in Parsons.

K-State Research and Extension is taking its popular Dining with Diabetes program and adapting it to a four-week “email challenge,” coinciding with National Dining with Diabetes Awareness month in November.

Registration for the free, email challenge begins Oct. 6 and runs through Oct. 27. Interested persons must register online at www.k-state.edu/diningwithdiabetes. The first lesson will be available via email message that will be sent on Nov. 1.

Sara Sawer, the program’s lead trainer and a family and consumer sciences agent in Sedgwick County, said the four-week challenge is “a great way to get basic information” on diabetes, whether participants have previously attended a Dining with Diabetes course or not.

“We see a lot of caregivers that say their spouse or their loved one has been diagnosed with diabetes,” Sawer said. “They are overwhelmed, and they don’t know what to prepare for meals, or what to do about grocery shopping. They feel like the way they used to do those things needs to change, but they don’t know where to start.”

What Sawer is able to tell people is that not all changes are drastic.
“You don’t need to make two different meals for the family,” she said. “Everyone can benefit from eating healthier. Everyone can benefit from choosing healthier carbohydrates, limiting saturated fat and sodium and added sugar."

“One thing we encourage people who take our classes is to be a little more adventurous, such as maybe once a week they will purchase a new fruit or vegetable or learn a new way to cook it. You may find things that you think you didn’t like, but find out that you do. It’s just a new way of thinking.”

Sawer said those who sign up for the email challenge will receive two email messages per week – one on Monday and one on Thursday. The weekly messages walk participants through setting goals, tracking progress, reflecting on what they’ve learned and more. Participants will also be invited to join a private Facebook group.

“We’ve learned from our face-to-face and our online programs that people want to have opportunities to engage and share and learn from others that are facing the same challenge with the disease,” Price said.

The program also guides participants through a new focus each week, according to Sawer. Those include primers on what diabetes is; the truth about carbohydrates; meal planning; and building a support system.

“And each week has recipes and videos at the end for people to enjoy and share with their support system,” Sawer said.

More information is available online, or by visiting local extension offices in Kansas.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Dining with Diabetes, www.k-state.edu/diningwithdiabetes

K-State Research and Extension local offices, https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/stateandareamaps.html

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