

Diet and diabetes go hand-in-hand

By Alice Park, Time

It's not that doctors don't know how to treat diabetes; the right diet and medications to control blood sugar can certainly keep the severest symptoms under control. But regular blood checks are challenging, and watching what you eat is even harder. The latest research, however, provides hope for helping people on the verge of developing Type 2 diabetes stick with a low-fat, low-calorie diet that may prevent the disease.

A decade ago, scientists showed that prediabetics who changed their diet and exercised regularly lowered their risk of the disease by 58 percent, a greater benefit than from medications designed to keep blood-glucose levels in check. But that study involved intensive one-on-one sessions in a lab setting—not a practical solution for the 79 million people in the U.S. who are currently the most vulnerable to developing the disease.

So the new trial focused more on the ways people diet in the real world. Prediabetic volunteers took part in group sessions to learn about healthy diet and exercise habits or educated themselves about those strategies using a DVD as well as e-mail and online counseling. Both groups lost more weight and controlled their prediabetes better than those who were provided with the standard diabetes care (basically medication and doctor weigh-ins). Those taking part in the group sessions lost an average of 14 pounds, and the self-trainers shed 10 pounds, compared with 5 pounds lost by the control group.

Such low-resource techniques could become critical to fighting the rising toll of diabetes, which affects 8 percent of the U.S. population, says the study's lead author, Dr. Jun Ma of

the Palo Alto Medical Foundation Research Institute."We know there are huge numbers of patients out there who need intervention. We just don't have the manpower and resources to deliver them."

The findings should help simple tools such as the DVDs and online resources become more widespread and reach more patients before they reach the tipping point, when they fall ill for real. What's more, self-taught good habits can often be longer-lasting than those hammered into you by a well-meaning doctor.