

HEALTHY CHOICES, HEALTHY LIVES

Classes that support your well-being and life with diabetes



At the Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Woodland, a spirited group shares a potluck dinner that's anything but routine. They've come to celebrate completion of Healthy Life, a six-week diabetes management course offered by Woodland Healthcare.

Diabetes patients have higher-than-normal blood glucose levels due to their resistance to insulin or their inability to produce it. Serious complications can result, including kidney damage, cardiovascular disease and stroke. "My main focus is to teach them about exercise, medication and how to eat balanced meals to control their blood sugar," says Herman Varela, Woodland Healthcare health educator. "A healthy way of life can prevent complications from diabetes."

Diabetes education is in demand nowadays because the disease is on the rise. Almost 8 percent of the U.S. population has diabetes; nearly 26 percent of adults over

age 20 have pre-diabetes, meaning their blood glucose levels are elevated but below diabetic levels. More than 10 percent of Latino Americans over age 20 have diabetes—a fact that inspired Woodland Healthcare to offer courses in English and Spanish, including the one Varela teaches. Healthy Life is free and open to community members with diabetes, supportive family and friends, and those interested in prevention. All ages are welcome—including children, another population that's seen a recent spike in cases of diabetes and pre-diabetes.

During the first session's overview, Varela helps the 15 to 20 participants understand diabetes and how it relates to their overall health. Students have their weight, blood pressure, blood glucose levels and cholesterol measured so they can track the impact of their lifestyle changes. A rule of confidentiality is established so everyone feels safe to share concerns. "It turns into a really good support group," says Varela. "They feel like they can talk about anything about the condition and they can be understood."

Units on exercise, nutrition and medication follow. Students walk together outside and learn to prepare low-fat meals. Varela demonstrates how to use glucose meters and offers savvy tips for taking medications. After six weeks, many students' blood pressure, blood glucose and cholesterol levels have improved, and many have lost weight, Varela says. At the culminating potluck, students show off what they've learned about nutrition—the perfect way to honor a healthier lifestyle.

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