GRATITUDE AND DIABETES

November is Diabetes Awareness Month. Coincidentally, it is also the month for a celebratory holiday, Thanksgiving Day, when we are urged to be grateful for the good things in our lives. But does gratitude have an effect on our physical health and does it impact the elements of diabetes?

Gratitude is the feeling of happiness emerging spontaneously from within because of what we have or have accomplished. According to *Psychology Today*, it is an emotion, an expression of appreciation for what one has. Psychologists find that over time, feeling grateful boosts happiness and fosters both physical and psychological health, even among those who are already struggling with mental health problems.

Here are some positive effects gratitude can have on our bodies:

- Releases toxic emotions
- Reduces pain
- Improves sleep quality
- Aids in stress regulation
- Reduces anxiety and depression

Consequently, being constantly grateful increases our quality of life and general happiness. It improves self-esteem and lessens depression. Practicing gratitude creates a "state of mindfulness, even moments per day, and helps provide perspective on the blessings we have received, and the challenges others may experience."[1] While the study in this domain is relatively new, an important component, as it relates to the management of diabetes, is SLEEP. If the quality of sleep is improved, having positive emotions and a feeling of happiness, a diabetic person will be better motivated to make dietary changes and exercise than a depressed person. Depression is a barrier that impedes self-care in patients with diabetes.

According to Sara Gottfried MD, gratitude upgrades your hormones from oxytocin to cortisol, and your neurotransmitters, including dopamine and serotonin. It increases blood flow and activity in the hypothalamus, the master gland that controls our hormones. Dr. Gottfried states, "By sleeping at least seven hours a day, you release optimal amounts of the hormone melatonin, which impacts overall health."[2] Conversely, people with type 2 diabetes could be deficient in melatonin since they usually suffer from insomnia.

But how does diabetes occur? What causes it? In a healthy person, the hormone insulin, which is manufactured in the pancreas, triggers the cells of the body to absorb excess glucose (sugar) that is floating in the blood stream, specially after eating a meal. If the cells are not efficiently responding to insulin, and are unable to absorb the glucose, that excess of glucose rises in the blood stream and is unable to go back down. As a result, the body transitions into hyperglycemic state or prediabetes. If the condition persists, then type 2 diabetes (also