

“No, Sugar Alone Doesn’t Cause Diabetes”: Expert Session Debunks Widespread Myths around the Condition and Emergencies

Dr. Zara Ahmed

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Carrying glucose snacks or tablets, wearing medical alert bracelets, and regularly monitoring blood sugar before activities like driving or exercising can help avoid emergencies.

Most people think that eating too much sugar is what causes diabetes. But as Dr. Zara Ahmed, Emergency Medicine Specialist at RAK Hospital, explained in a compelling webinar held as part of the RAK Diabetes Challenge 2025, the truth is far more complex and understanding it can quite literally save lives.

Hosted as part of the educational Diabeat Webinar Series on “Myths & Facts on Diabetes and Diabetic Emergencies”, Dr. Zara’s session tackled some of the most persistent misconceptions surrounding Diabetes Mellitus, offering evidence-based facts and practical emergency tips for patients, families, and caregivers.

“Contrary to popular belief, sugar doesn’t directly cause diabetes. But a diet high in sugar can lead to weight gain, which is a major risk factor alongside age, obesity, PCOS, gestational diabetes, and yes, family history,” Dr. Zara explained. “Understanding these nuances is key to prevention and better management.”

One of the biggest myths she addressed was that prediabetes isn’t serious. In reality, prediabetes is a critical warning sign. Without lifestyle changes like healthier eating and regular physical activity it can rapidly progress to full-blown diabetes.

Dr. Zara also dismantled the notion that people with diabetes need “special” or expensive meals. Instead, she highlighted that balanced, portion-controlled diets are what truly matter. Lean proteins, vegetables, healthy fats, and whole grains form the foundation of a good diet for everyone not just diabetics. She also advised against over-reliance on sugar-free products, noting that while generally safe, excessive consumption of sugar alcohols can lead to bloating, gas, or diarrhea.

Exercise was another area where myths run rampant. Many still believe that people with diabetes shouldn't exercise or that workouts always lead to dangerous drops in blood sugar. Dr. Zara clarified that exercise is one of the most powerful tools for managing blood sugar, improving insulin sensitivity, and boosting overall health provided it's paired with proper monitoring and medical advice. Even short, consistent sessions, such as brisk walks, can have meaningful benefits. Strength training, alongside cardio, plays a crucial role in boosting metabolism and aiding glucose control.

Beyond lifestyle, Dr. Zara turned her attention to emergencies — a subject often overlooked despite its life-threatening potential. She explained that both hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar) and hyperglycaemia (high blood sugar) require immediate recognition and response. Severe hypoglycaemia can lead to confusion, seizures, unconsciousness, and even death if untreated. Hyperglycaemia, on the other hand, can cause dehydration and fatigue, and in severe cases, may progress to diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA) or hyperosmolar hyperglycaemic state (HHS), both of which are medical emergencies.

To prepare for such situations, Dr. Zara offered practical advice: carrying glucose snacks or tablets, wearing medical alert bracelets, educating family members and close contacts on how to respond during an episode, and regularly monitoring blood sugar before activities like driving or exercising. She also highlighted that not everyone can "feel" when their sugar levels drop; some develop hypoglycaemia unawareness, which makes routine monitoring even more critical.

The session underscored that diabetes management is not one-dimensional. It goes beyond medication and involves a careful balance of diet, physical activity, regular monitoring, medical supervision, and self-awareness. Dispelling myths is not just about correcting misunderstandings, it is a powerful way to empower individuals to take charge of their health, act early, and prevent complications.

RAK Hospital's RAK Diabetes Challenge 2025 continues to run weekly webinars, each designed to educate and empower the community on pressing health issues, from diabetes and obesity to heart disease and beyond.

For more information, visit www.rakdiabeteschallenge.com

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