

Ask Leyla: What is “lean diabetes”?



Q: I'm 75 years old and was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. I'm skinny and have never been overweight. I was told I have “lean diabetes”. What does this mean?

A: There are a number of factors contributing to your recent onset of type 2 diabetes. First, there's such a thing as being normal weight, but overfat. So being skinny doesn't really tell us much. A body composition will determine your fat percentage status. Greater than 30% fat is categorized as metabolic obesity.

But type 2 diabetes isn't exclusively connected to your weight status. Many people in the overweight category carry a lot of lean muscle—like athletes. The most significant impact on the metabolic abnormality called type 2 diabetes is what you're eating. Remember that diabetes is defined as a condition of carbohydrate intolerance. You can be skinny and eat a lot of carbs most of your life—which you were more tolerant of when you were younger, but unfortunately as we get older we become more carbohydrate intolerant. So now, after a lifetime of secreting so much insulin to support spikes in blood sugar from carb consumption, your pancreas is getting worn out. At age 75, this is most likely the reason for your diagnosis.

The single most important thing you can do going forward is make the necessary changes in your diet to manage and reverse it—preserving the function of your pancreas. A qualified nutritionist can help you in this endeavor.

To your health!