

Medicare and Diabetes

New Services Available

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New for 2002, Medicare now covers medical nutrition therapy (MNT) for its beneficiaries. Previously, only a small percentage of Medicare recipients with extreme health problems had access to MNT. Eliminated were the millions of recipients who lived with less severe health conditions. Today, approximately, 110,000 Medicare recipients with kidney disease, and 4.5 million diabetics are eligible for consultation with registered dietitians or other qualified nutrition professionals.

Research has demonstrated that MNT is more cost effective and prolongs lives of those who have diabetes. Specifically, a congressionally commissioned study reported in 2000 by the Institute of Medicine, showed that recipients of MNT demonstrated an improved quality of life.

MNT services consist of an initial assessment, follow-up visits for interventions, and reassessments as necessary during the 12-month period beginning with the initial assessment to assure compliance with the dietary plan. As with the traditional services, Medicare covers 80 percent of the nutrition counseling and related services.

“We want to encourage beneficiaries to act before they get sick,” said U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson, in a press statement. “Medicare must play a leading role in preventing, containing, or slowing illness.”

Other Services Covered by Medicare

Administered by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Medicare is the nation’s largest health insurance program covering all Americans 65 and older, those with permanent kidney failure and certain people with disabilities. Medicare currently covers nearly 40 million Americans.

Traditionally, Medicare pays 80 percent of the cost for diabetes monitoring supplies including glucose testing monitors, blood glucose test strips, lancet devices and lancets, glucose control solutions, therapeutic shoes for people with diabetes, and glaucoma screening, with some limits on supplies or how often they can be obtained. However, it should be noted that Medicare does not cover insulin, oral anti-diabetic agents (medications), or syringes needed to administer insulin.

“By expanding preventive services, we are starting to change how Medicare helps beneficiaries think about their health care choices,” said Secretary Thompson.

For a more detailed description of the Medicare program and related services covered go to <http://www.medicare.gov>

