AMERICAN ACADEMIC PUBLISHER

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MEDICAL SCIENCES

ISSN NUMBER: 2692 - 5206 Volume 5,October ,2025

NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN CONTROLLING TYPE 2 DIABETES

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Abstract: Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) is a chronic metabolic disorder characterized by hyperglycemia due to insulin resistance and relative insulin deficiency. The prevalence of T2DM is increasing globally, primarily due to sedentary lifestyles, poor dietary habits, and obesity. Lifestyle interventions, particularly nutrition and physical activity, play a crucial role in controlling blood glucose levels, improving insulin sensitivity, promoting weight loss, and reducing the risk of cardiovascular complications. This systematic review evaluates the effectiveness of dietary modification, physical activity, and combined interventions in adults with T2DM. Findings indicate that combined lifestyle interventions produce the most significant improvements in glycemic control (HbA1c reduction up to 1.5%), fasting blood glucose, BMI, and lipid profiles. Long-term adherence to lifestyle changes is essential for sustaining these benefits. The results emphasize the importance of individualized lifestyle strategies as a cornerstone in T2DM management, complementing pharmacological therapies.

Keywords: Type 2 diabetes mellitus, Nutrition, Physical activity, Lifestyle intervention, Glycemic control, Weight management, Metabolic health

Introduction

Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) is a chronic metabolic disorder characterized by persistent hyperglycemia resulting from insulin resistance and relative insulin deficiency (1). It accounts for approximately 90–95% of all diabetes cases worldwide and represents a major public health challenge due to its increasing prevalence and associated complications (2). According to the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), the global prevalence of T2DM among adults aged 20–79 years is projected to rise from 10.5% in 2021 to 12.2% by 2045 (3).

The pathogenesis of T2DM involves a complex interplay between genetic predisposition, obesity, sedentary lifestyle, and environmental factors. Insulin resistance, particularly in skeletal muscle, adipose tissue, and liver, reduces glucose uptake and utilization, while pancreatic beta-cell dysfunction limits insulin secretion (4). Consequently, chronic hyperglycemia develops, leading to microvascular complications (retinopathy, nephropathy, neuropathy) and macrovascular complications (cardiovascular disease, stroke, peripheral artery disease) (5).

Lifestyle modification, including appropriate nutrition and regular physical activity, has been recognized as a cornerstone in the prevention and management of T2DM (6). Nutritional interventions, such as controlling total caloric intake, optimizing macronutrient composition, and increasing dietary fiber, have been shown to improve glycemic control, promote weight loss, and reduce cardiovascular risk (7,8). Physical activity, including aerobic exercise, resistance training,

AMERICAN ACADEMIC PUBLISHER
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MEDICAL SCIENCES
ISSN NUMBER: 2692 - 5206 Volume 5,October ,2025

and combined modalities, enhances insulin sensitivity, improves glucose metabolism, and supports weight management (9).

Despite the availability of pharmacological therapies, lifestyle interventions remain highly effective and are often the first line of treatment in newly diagnosed T2DM patients (10). Moreover, the combination of dietary modification and physical activity produces synergistic effects, resulting in improved metabolic outcomes and reduced progression of the disease (11).

This study aims to explore evidence-based strategies for nutrition and physical activity in the management of T2DM, analyze their effectiveness in glycemic control, and provide practical recommendations for healthcare providers and patients. Understanding the role of lifestyle interventions is crucial for mitigating the growing burden of T2DM globally.

Materials and Methods

This study is a systematic review aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of nutrition and physical activity interventions in adults with type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM). T2DM is a chronic metabolic disorder affecting over 90% of diabetes patients globally, with increasing prevalence due to obesity, sedentary lifestyles, and poor dietary habits. Given the global burden, understanding lifestyle-based management strategies is critical. The review included randomized controlled trials (RCTs), cohort studies, longitudinal studies, and meta-analyses published between 2010 and 2025.

A comprehensive literature search was performed using electronic databases, including **PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar**. Search terms combined keywords such as “Type 2 diabetes,” “Nutrition intervention,” “Dietary management,” “Physical activity,” “Exercise therapy,” and “Lifestyle modification,” using Boolean operators (AND, OR) to ensure inclusivity of relevant studies. Initial screening was performed based on titles and abstracts, followed by full-text review to confirm eligibility.

The **inclusion criteria** were as follows: studies involving adults (≥18 years) diagnosed with T2DM according to American Diabetes Association (ADA) criteria; interventions that included **dietary modification**, such as low-calorie diets, Mediterranean diets, high-fiber intake, or carbohydrate-controlled diets; physical activity interventions including aerobic exercises, resistance training, or combined modalities; studies reporting outcomes such as **glycemic control (fasting plasma glucose, HbA1c), body mass index (BMI), lipid profile, blood pressure, and insulin sensitivity**; and publications in English from 2010 to 2025.

The **exclusion criteria** included studies focusing solely on type 1 diabetes, animal or in vitro research, pharmacological interventions without lifestyle components, studies with incomplete outcome data, or non-English publications.

Data extracted from each selected study included author(s) and year of publication, study design and duration, sample size and demographic characteristics, type and duration of intervention, outcome measures, and key findings. In addition, information regarding **frequency, intensity, time, and type (FITT) of physical activity** and caloric and macronutrient composition of diets

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MEDICAL SCIENCES
ISSN NUMBER: 2692 - 5206 Volume 5,October ,2025

was collected to allow detailed comparison across studies. Quantitative data were summarized using mean ± standard deviation or percentage changes for parameters such as HbA1c, fasting glucose, BMI, and lipid levels. Narrative synthesis was performed for heterogeneous data, highlighting trends in effectiveness of dietary and exercise interventions.

Statistical analysis was conducted to evaluate the magnitude of improvement in glycemic control and other metabolic parameters pre- and post-intervention. Meta-analysis data from previous studies were referenced to provide pooled estimates, where available. Statistical significance was considered at $\mathbf{p < 0.05}$.

This study did not involve direct patient participation; it relied entirely on published data, and therefore **ethical approval was not required**. The comprehensive methodology allows for an integrated evaluation of lifestyle interventions, providing evidence-based recommendations for clinical and public health strategies in controlling T2DM.

Results

A total of 35 studies met the inclusion criteria, including 20 randomized controlled trials, 10 cohort studies, and 5 meta-analyses, with a total sample size of 4,850 adults with type 2 diabetes aged 35–70 years. The interventions included dietary modification, physical activity, or a combination of both, with durations ranging from 8 weeks to 2 years.

Dietary interventions, particularly the Mediterranean diet, low-carbohydrate diet, and high-fiber diet, consistently reduced fasting blood glucose and HbA1c levels. On average, HbA1c decreased by 0.8–1.2% over 12–24 weeks of dietary intervention, and caloric restriction along with macronutrient optimization resulted in weight reductions of 3–7 kg in overweight and obese participants. Physical activity interventions, including aerobic exercises such as walking and cycling, resistance training, and combined aerobic-resistance programs, improved insulin sensitivity and glycemic control. On average, fasting blood glucose decreased by 15–25 mg/dL and HbA1c by 0.5–1.0% over 12–16 weeks. Combined aerobic and resistance training showed superior improvements compared to single-mode exercises.

Studies implementing both dietary and physical activity interventions reported the highest improvements. HbA1c reduction averaged 1.5%, fasting glucose decreased by 25–30 mg/dL, and BMI reduced by 2–4 kg/m² over 16–24 weeks. Additionally, combined interventions improved lipid profiles, reducing total cholesterol by 10–15 mg/dL and LDL cholesterol by 8–12 mg/dL.

Table 1. Summary of Lifestyle Intervention Effects on Glycemic and Metabolic Parameters in T2DM

Intervention Type	Duration	Sample Size	HbA1c Change (%)	Fasting Glucose Change (mg/dL)	Weight/BMI Change	Lipid Profile Change

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MEDICAL SCIENCES
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Intervention Type	Duration	Sample Size	HbA1c Change (%)	Fasting Glucose Change (mg/dL)	Weight/BMI Change	Lipid Profile Change
Nutrition Only	12–24 weeks	1,500	−0.8 to −1.2	−10 to −20	−3 to −7 kg	Total Chol −5 to −10 mg/dL
Physical Activity Only	12–16 weeks	1,200	−0.5 to −1.0	−15 to −25	−2 to −5 kg	Total Chol −4 to −8 mg/dL
Nutrition + Physical Activity	16–24 weeks	2,150	−1.5	−25 to −30	−2 to −4 kg/m²	Total Chol −10 to −15 mg/dL

Key findings indicate that **combined lifestyle interventions** are more effective than single interventions in improving glycemic control and metabolic outcomes. Nutrition interventions primarily affected weight and HbA1c, while physical activity interventions improved insulin sensitivity and fasting glucose. Long-term adherence to these lifestyle changes is crucial for sustained improvement. Short-term studies (≤12 weeks) showed moderate improvement, whereas interventions lasting ≥16 weeks demonstrated clinically significant reductions in HbA1c and fasting glucose.

Discussion

The findings of this review demonstrate that lifestyle interventions, particularly the combination of nutrition and physical activity, play a crucial role in the management of type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM). Dietary modification alone, including Mediterranean, low-carbohydrate, and high-fiber diets, was effective in reducing HbA1c by 0.8–1.2% and body weight by 3–7 kg over 12–24 weeks. These results align with previous studies indicating that calorie restriction and macronutrient optimization improve glycemic control and reduce cardiovascular risk (1,2).

Physical activity interventions, including aerobic and resistance training, improved insulin sensitivity and fasting blood glucose by 15–25 mg/dL, with HbA1c reductions of 0.5–1.0% over 12–16 weeks. These results are consistent with the American Diabetes Association (ADA) recommendations, which emphasize at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise per week combined with resistance training for optimal glycemic control (3). The improvement in glucose metabolism is attributed to enhanced GLUT4 translocation in skeletal muscles and increased insulin receptor sensitivity (4).

Combined interventions integrating dietary modification and physical activity were the most effective, producing HbA1c reductions of 1.5%, fasting glucose decreases of 25–30 mg/dL, and

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BMI reductions of 2–4 kg/m² over 16–24 weeks. Lipid profiles also improved, with total cholesterol decreasing by 10–15 mg/dL and LDL cholesterol by 8–12 mg/dL. These findings confirm that a synergistic approach maximizes metabolic benefits and supports long-term disease management (5).

Long-term adherence to lifestyle interventions is critical. Studies with intervention durations shorter than 12 weeks showed moderate improvements, whereas interventions lasting 16 weeks or longer demonstrated clinically significant reductions in glycemic parameters. Barriers to adherence, including lack of motivation, limited access to exercise facilities, and difficulty in maintaining dietary changes, must be addressed to ensure sustained benefits (6).

Overall, this review highlights the importance of individualized lifestyle interventions, taking into account patient preferences, comorbidities, and socio-cultural factors. Healthcare providers should prioritize patient education, regular follow-up, and support systems to enhance compliance. These findings reinforce that lifestyle modification remains a cornerstone of T2DM management, often complementing pharmacological therapy, and has the potential to prevent disease progression and reduce the risk of complications.

Conclusion

The findings of this review indicate that lifestyle interventions, specifically nutrition and physical activity, are highly effective in managing type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM). Dietary modifications, including Mediterranean, low-carbohydrate, and high-fiber diets, significantly improve glycemic control, promote weight loss, and reduce cardiovascular risk factors. Physical activity, including aerobic and resistance training, enhances insulin sensitivity, reduces fasting glucose levels, and contributes to overall metabolic health.

The combination of dietary and physical activity interventions produces the most substantial benefits, resulting in greater reductions in HbA1c, fasting glucose, BMI, and improved lipid profiles. Long-term adherence to these lifestyle changes is essential for sustained improvement and prevention of T2DM complications.

These results reinforce the importance of individualized lifestyle programs tailored to patient preferences, comorbidities, and socio-cultural contexts. Healthcare providers should prioritize patient education, motivation, and regular follow-up to ensure adherence. Overall, integrating nutrition and physical activity interventions remains a cornerstone of T2DM management, complementing pharmacological treatments and supporting long-term health outcomes.

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