

As we enter into the holiday period full of feasts and much needed downtime, we take time to spotlight a sleeping giant that affects millions of Americans' diet and lifestyle - diabetes. In this November 2012 Monthly WellPATH Spotlight, we help you understand:

- Types of diabetes
- Your risk for diabetes
- Methods for diabetes self-care & prevention

There are also links that direct you to Centers for Disease Control (CDC) information resources to help you along your path to better health.



WHAT IS DIABETES?

Diabetes is a chronic disease that occurs in two main types. Type 1 and type 2 diabetes revolve around a breakdown in the body's ability to either produce or manage insulin. (A third type, gestational diabetes occurs only during pregnancy.)

Insulin is the hormone that controls the processing of glucose, a form of blood sugar that moves constantly through the bloodstream in order to supply the body with the energy needed for muscle contractions and metabolism. The job of insulin is to make sure the glucose actually moves into the body's cells. Without insulin, the glucose builds up in the bloodstream. Over time, elevated glucose levels can damage the linings of blood vessels leading to damage to the eyes, kidneys and other sensitive tissues. This damage can result in blindness, impotency, kidney failure, increased risk for heart attack and the deterioration of nerves or blood vessels, and can force the amputation of limbs.

The process that causes type 1 diabetes, the less common form, directly affects the pancreas by destroying the beta islet cells that produce insulin. In the process that causes type 2 diabetes (which affects nine out of 10 diabetics) the pancreas either does not produce enough insulin, or the body becomes less and less efficient at getting insulin to move glucose into the cells (insulin resistance). A potential to develop type 2 diabetes can be inherited, but its development is triggered by environmental factors such as being overweight and sedentary.

YOU'RE AT RISK FOR DIABETES IF...

Diabetes is more widespread than most people realize. An estimated 18.2 million Americans have diabetes but only 13 million have been diagnosed.

By the time the remaining 5 million are diagnosed, they will have had diabetes for an average of five to seven years, says Davida F. Kruger, M.S.N., R.N., a past officer of the American Diabetes Association (ADA). "The condition is often missed in routine exams because it can develop slowly and shows no initial symptoms." Diabetes is more common in African Americans, Latinos, American Indians, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

Most health care providers test blood sugar or glucose as part of an annual exam, but don't hesitate to ask for this test if you're concerned. A fasting blood-sugar level of more than 100 mg/dl indicates you may need additional tests for diabetes.

"Once people know they have diabetes, they can control their glucose to improve their long-term health," Ms. Kruger says. "Research has shown that eye disease can occur within five years of the disease's onset and kidney disease starts to develop after 15 years if diabetes isn't well controlled. But a person's risk of having diabetic complications is reduced by 65 percent if the condition is well controlled."

SELF CARE

The ADA recommends that people with diabetes use the following strategies to control their glucose and their symptoms.

Eat a Healthful Diet

- Watch your total caloric intake. Your diet should consist of appropriate amounts of protein, complex carbohydrates and fat. The type of carbohydrates eaten will determine how quickly the blood sugar rises following a meal. Complex carbohydrates raise the sugar more slowly, while simple sugars can cause a rapid rise. Low-carbohydrate diets (total carbohydrates less than 130 grams per day) are not recommended.
- Follow a meal plan. A meal plan tells you how much food you need and how to plan meals and snacks so you know what to eat and when. It should be suited to your lifestyle and nutritional needs. Your health care provider can work with you to develop a meal plan that fits your goals.
- Maintain or attain a healthy weight. If you have type 2 diabetes and are overweight, it is important to reach a reasonable body weight. Often if you lose only 5 to 10 pounds, your blood glucose levels are easier to control. For children with type 1 diabetes, it is important to consume enough calories to provide for normal growth and development.

Monitor Your Blood Glucose Regularly

Uncontrolled, high blood glucose levels can cause serious health problems, including heart disease, kidney disease, blindness or nerve damage. If you have diabetes, you can help prevent these problems by keeping your blood glucose levels in check. Your health care provider can teach you how to monitor your blood glucose. He or she will also recommend how often you should test your blood.

Exercise

Exercise can lower blood glucose levels, making body cells more sensitive to insulin and improving their ability to use and store glucose. In fact, exercise combined with fewer calories will often control type 2 diabetes without the need for medication. If you exercise, you can also enjoy other benefits, such as improved heart and lung efficiency, reduced body fat, improved muscle tone and improved fitness.

Your goal should be 30 to 60 minutes of moderate aerobic activity most days of the week, when possible. An hour a day of moderate (walking) or 30 minutes a day of vigorous (jogging) activity may be needed to lose weight. Your doctor can help you determine the type of program that is best for you.



Medication

Take medication if your doctor prescribes it. People with diabetes who need medication have a variety of choices to lower their blood-sugar levels.

PREVENTION

If you don't have diabetes, there are steps you can take to reduce your risk:

- Attain or maintain a healthy weight. If you are overweight, even a small amount of weight loss will be beneficial.
- Stay active. Try to get at least 30 minutes of activity most days of the week.

If you do have diabetes, prevention efforts are directed at preventing complications of diabetes:

- Get recommended exams to detect complications of diabetes.
- Follow your treatment plan to control your blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol.
- Get a flu shot each year and a pneumococcal vaccine if you are older than 64.
- Discuss taking low-dose aspirin to prevent a heart attack with your health care provider to see if it is right for you.

HELPFUL RESOURCES & WEBSITES

For more information regarding diabetes, check out the additional information from the Centers for Disease Control listed below:

- Webpage: [Diabetes Public Health Resource](#)
- Podcast: [Keep Your Kids Moving](#)
- Video: [Blood, Sugar & Fears](#)



Sources:

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