

HEALTH & WELFARE

Diabetes: Tackling a Growing Health Concern

By Adam S. Kelman, M.D.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 29 million people—over nine percent of the U.S. population—live with diabetes. That number includes more than eight million people who have diabetes but don't know it, because they haven't been diagnosed yet.

As you age, the chance of getting diabetes increases. Nearly 12 million Americans, 65 and older, are a big part of that percentage.

When you think about it, you probably know someone who suffers from diabetes—a family member, a friend, a co-worker. The disease isn't selective. Diabetes can impact anyone, regardless of social, economic or ethnic background.

What exactly is diabetes?

Diabetes is a medical condition in which sugar or glucose levels build up in your bloodstream. Your body turns the carbohydrates in the food you eat into sugar, or glucose. Since carbohydrates are present in varying amounts in most foods, including fruits and vegetables, it is important to monitor the foods you eat. The sugar that is produced goes to the body's cells through the blood to make energy.

Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas. The job of the pancreas is to release enough insulin to move the sugar into your body's cells. The insulin acts like a bridge for the sugar to enter your cells and travel to other parts of the body. But sometimes this system doesn't work properly. Diabetes is caused when your

body is unable to create or effectively use its own insulin.

In Type 1 diabetes, the body is unable to produce any insulin. However, the most common form of diabetes is Type 2, where blood sugar levels rise higher than normal. At first, your pancreas makes extra insulin to make up for it. But over time, it can't make enough insulin to keep your blood glucose at normal levels.

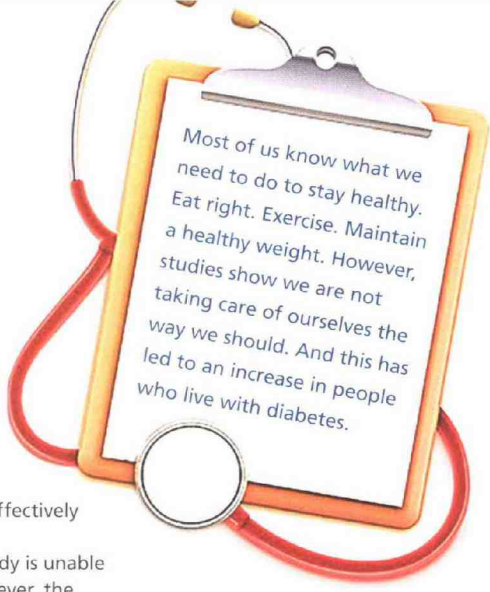
When glucose builds up in the blood instead of going into cells, your cells are starved for energy. Eventually, the high blood glucose levels may hurt your eyes, kidneys, nerves or heart.

Type 2 diabetes is treated with lifestyle changes, oral medications (pills) and insulin.

Warning signs and risk factors

Early detection is important. Tell your doctor if you start to experience the following common symptoms of diabetes.

- Frequent urination
- Excessive thirst
- Constant hunger—even though you have eaten
- Extreme fatigue
- Blurry vision
- Cuts/bruises that are slow to heal
- Weight loss—even though you are eating more (Type 1)
- Tingling, pain or numbness in the hands/feet (Type 2)
- Keep in mind that symptoms vary in strength or discomfort from person to person and could also be a warning sign that you have pre-diabetes or



Most of us know what we need to do to stay healthy. Eat right. Exercise. Maintain a healthy weight. However, studies show we are not taking care of ourselves the way we should. And this has led to an increase in people who live with diabetes.

“borderline diabetes.” Left unchecked, pre-diabetes can lead to Type 2.

Risk factors include:

- Overweight/lack of regular exercise
- Family history of diabetes
- Self-identified as pre-diabetic
- Cultural background (African-Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are at increased risk)
- Over 65 years of age
- Previous gestational diabetes

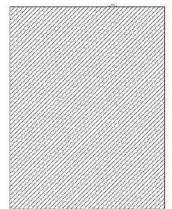
Managing diabetes

Managing diabetes is a daily challenge to keep blood sugar levels in the desired range. Balancing the food you eat with exercise and medicine (if prescribed) will help you control your weight and keep your blood glucose in the healthy range.

It's important to:

- Monitor your blood sugar regularly as directed
- Stay physically active
- Maintain a healthy diet (count carbohydrates) and fluid intake
- Quit smoking
- See your doctor every 3-6 months and take medications as prescribed
- Recognize and treat the symptoms of low or high blood sugar
- Reduce stress by practicing relaxation techniques

Actively managing the disease is essential. The emotional and physical toll diabetes takes is steep—the disease



claims the life of one American every three minutes, more than breast cancer and AIDS combined. And so is the financial cost. The CDC estimates that a person with diabetes has medical expenses that are 2.3 times higher than someone without diabetes and costs Americans more than \$245 billion.

Despite these statistics, there's good news when you take control. Just losing 10 to 15 pounds can make a difference. And any type of physical activity will help lower your blood glucose and put you on track to living a healthy, normal life with diabetes.



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