

Diabetic Nation

Q: Is diabetes a growing health concern in America?

A: Yes. The number of Americans with diabetes has risen to nearly 26 million people---and for every one person with diabetes, there are another 3 Americans with prediabetes. Last year an estimated 1.9 million Americans were newly-diagnosed with diabetes. Over 105 million Americans have either prediabetes or diabetes, making us truly a Diabetes Nation. But the good news is that the disease management of diabetes is improving.

Prediabetes is a condition in which blood sugar levels are higher than normal, but not high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. Prediabetes raises a person's risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

Diabetes affects 11% of adults aged 20 and older, and prediabetes affects 35% of the same cohort. An astonishing 7 million Americans have diabetes but don't even know it. Half of Americans aged 65 and older have prediabetes, and nearly 27% have diabetes.

Diabetes occurs when your body can't control high levels of blood glucose. Diabetes can cause heart disease, kidney failure, and amputations. It can also lead to vision loss or blindness.

There are two major types of diabetes. Type 1, or juvenile diabetes, usually starts in childhood, when a person's body is not producing enough insulin, which helps cells absorb glucose. Low levels of insulin means glucose stays in the blood.

Type 2 diabetes is often associated with older age, obesity, high blood pressure, and the other risk

factors. Either your body is not producing enough insulin, or the insulin is being ignored by your cells.

Some risk factors for diabetes you can't control, such as a family history of the disease. Race/ethnicity is also a factor. African-Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians have a higher risk for diabetes.

But other factors are "modifiable," such as high blood pressure, obesity, and high cholesterol. If you have any of these risk factors, you should have a doctor check your glucose levels.

Last year the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned that 1 in 3 U.S. adults could have diabetes by 2050 if current trends continue. Type 2 diabetes now accounts for 90% or more of diabetes cases. The CDC says that the number of people with diabetes is rising because more people are developing diabetes, and people are living longer with diabetes, which raises the total number of those with the disease.

But better management of the disease is lowering the risk of cardiovascular disease and reducing complications such as kidney failure. A structured lifestyle program that includes losing weight and increasing physical activity can prevent or delay type 2 diabetes.

Diabetes is now the seventh leading cause of death in the United States, and diabetes care costs \$174 billion annually.

If you have not had your glucose levels checked by your doctor recently, the first step is to ask for that test to be done. For information on diabetes prevention and control go to: www.yourdiabetesinfo.org.

