

DIABETES: ARE YOU AT RISK?

In the U.S., there are currently 30.3 million people in the U.S. with diabetes. If we also count Americans that are prediabetic, that number jumps to 100 million people just in the U.S. This is a serious reflection of our overall health and lifestyle. This is also a condition that makes billions of dollars each year for the pharmaceutical industry.

Diabetes is a chronic condition that has to do with how your body manufactures and uses insulin. Insulin is a hormone made by the pancreas and helps glucose in your blood enter cells in your muscles, fat and liver. Insulin is counterbalanced by another hormone, glucagon, so that one's blood glucose levels are just right. All forms of diabetes are characterized by higher than normal glucose levels. This could be because our pancreas isn't making enough insulin or we are insulin-resistant and the insulin receptors in our body are not working properly. This means that your muscles, fat and liver cannot use the glucose from your blood. This can be due to excess weight gain, increased belly fat, lack of exercise, smoking and lack of sleep. The pancreas tries to make increased amounts of insulin, but eventually it just cannot keep up and gets "worn out".

Uncontrolled diabetes causes 1.6 million deaths each year, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). It can damage blood vessels and results in lack of circulation in the legs and feet. It can also double the risk of heart attack and stroke and can impact the eyes, kidneys and nerves.

Diabetes now actually includes 5 different types. **Type 1 (juvenile or insulin-resistant)** is an autoimmune condition in which the pancreatic cells are actually attacked at an early age, usually in childhood or the early teen years. There is a huge hereditary component here, but diet, lifestyle and environment can have a positive or negative impact. Leaky gut or intestinal permeability is a key player in any autoimmune conditions. Celiac disease or non-celiac gluten sensitivity must also be considered.

Type 2 diabetes is often called "adult onset" and usually reflects insulin-resistance. This type of diabetes is often associated with being overweight, having increased belly fat, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Type 3 diabetes or **Alzheimer's** currently affects 40 million people. If you have Type 2 diabetes (and you are female) you have four times the risk to develop Alzheimer's. Alzheimer's disease is a neuro degenerative disease that affects memory and cognition primarily in people over age 65. Research shows that this condition can occur

when neurons in the brain become unable to respond to insulin due to elevated blood sugar (glycation).

Prediabetes is due to higher than normal blood sugar levels. Currently 84 million adults in the U.S. have prediabetes. This is definitely a warning because within 5 years, most people will progress to type 2 diabetes without diet and lifestyle changes.

Gestational diabetes occurs only during pregnancy (24-28 weeks) and is found in about 10% of pregnant women. This is a hormonal condition which can be controlled with diet, but in severe cases, insulin is sometimes necessary. This is a dangerous condition for the baby and the mom.

So, what are the signs, symptoms and risk factors for type 1, 2 and 3 diabetes? Understand that prediabetes and gestational diabetes are warning signs and need to be dealt with immediately.

1. Unexplained hunger and fatigue
2. Excess thirst and increased urinary frequency
3. Dry mouth and itchy skin
4. Blurred vision
5. Chronic yeast infections
6. Slow-healing cuts
7. Pain/numbness in feet/legs/hands
8. Sudden weight loss (type 1)
9. BMI greater than 25
10. Over age 45
11. History of gestational diabetes
12. Memory loss that disrupts daily life
13. Difficulty planning/problem solving
14. Confusion about dates, names, places
15. Misplacing objects
16. Withdrawal from social activities
17. Forgetting words

For sure many of these changes can occur with normal aging or other health problems. However, if these symptoms persist or cannot be explained, it's time to get some bloodwork done. In the meantime, we can all be a little more diligent about our diet and lifestyle. Yes, the holidays are upon us, but let's be clear about two things:

1. Everyday we get to choose whether we sit on the couch or go for a walk, take a class or work out at a gym.
2. We are in control of our actions when it comes to food and alcohol. We can decide to eat two cookies or the whole package. We get to choose what goes in our shopping cart or whether or not to cook our own food or just get take out.

Happy Holidays to all and remember you are in control!



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