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WELLNESS WEEKLY

Diabetes & Your Health

Diabetes is a disease in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin. Insulin is a hormone that is needed to convert sugar, starches and other food into energy needed for daily life. The cause of diabetes continues to be a mystery, although both genetics and environmental factors such as obesity and lack of exercise appear to play roles.

There are 23.6 million children and adults in the United States who have diabetes. While an estimated 17.9 million have been diagnosed with diabetes, unfortunately, 5.7 million people (or nearly one quarter) are unaware that they have the disease.

In order to determine whether or not a patient has pre-diabetes or diabetes, health care providers conduct a Fasting Plasma Glucose Test (FPG) or an Oral Glucose Tolerance Test (OGTT). Either test can be used to diagnose pre-diabetes or diabetes. The American Diabetes Association recommends the FPG because it is easier, faster, and less expensive to perform.



Major Types of Diabetes

Type 1 diabetes: Results from the body's failure to produce insulin. It is estimated that 5-10% of Americans who are diagnosed with diabetes have type 1 diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes: Results from insulin resistance (a condition in which the body fails to properly use insulin), combined with relative insulin deficiency. Most Americans who are diagnosed with diabetes have type 2 diabetes.

Gestational diabetes: Immediately after pregnancy, 5% to 10% of women with gestational diabetes are found to have diabetes, usually, type 2.

Pre-diabetes: This is a condition that occurs when a person's blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough for a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes. There are 57 million Americans who have pre-diabetes, in addition to the 23.6 million with diabetes.

Pre-diabetes is a serious medical condition that can be treated. The good news is that the recently completed Diabetes Prevention Program study conclusively showed that people with pre-diabetes can prevent the development of type 2 diabetes by making changes in their diet and increasing their level of physical activity.

Here are some quick tips:

- Pass on the peas, corn, carrots, and other starchy vegetables. Focus instead on leafy greens.
- Get most of your protein from poultry rather than red meat.
- Eat oily fish twice a week - it's full of healthy fat.
- Pick breads that have a lot of fiber.
- Learn to read nutrition labels.

Certain health problems (including being overweight, unhealthy cholesterol, smoking, high blood glucose, high blood pressure, and physical inactivity) put you at higher risk for diabetes and heart disease. Keeping an eye on these problems -- keeping them "in check" -- can help you prevent diabetes and heart disease.