



IT'S YOUR DIABETES LIFE!

Eight Surprising Facts About Diabetes

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Diabetes is a growing epidemic in the United States. At last count (2012), 29.1 million Americans had been diagnosed with the disease. That's a 62 percent increase in the last 10 years. Public health officials estimate that 8.1 million (almost 28 percent) of those with diabetes are undiagnosed, meaning their diabetes is progressing unchecked.

First things first. What is the difference between type 1 and type 2 diabetes? In type 1 – which has no proven direct cause – a person's immune system destroys healthy beta cells in the pancreas, where insulin is produced. Your body is therefore unable to make insulin on its own. With type 2, one's body does not use insulin properly. The body's progressive loss of beta cells and insulin resistance results in an insulin deficiency, causing sugar to build up in the blood. Type 2 diabetes has been linked to obesity, genetics and inactivity, but like type 1, the exact cause is largely unknown.

As diabetes continues to grow in the U.S., it's important to make sure you are getting the right information to better manage your condition. Here are eight surprising facts about diabetes:

1. Diabetes is not the result of eating too much sugar.

It is a common misconception that diabetes is the result of too much sugar intake. While there is a link between sugar and diabetes, sugar alone does not trigger the disease. However, excess consumption of sugar can contribute to obesity, which is a main risk factor for type 2 diabetes.

2. Today, most children who develop diabetes are not overweight.

Most people assume that children who are diagnosed with diabetes are overweight, but that's not true. Today, more than 5,000 children are diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, which is most closely related to poor diet, weight gain and lack of physical activity. However, some 15-20,000 children are diagnosed with type 1 diabetes each year. Those children are often diagnosed after experiencing several symptoms, like weight loss and sudden, unquenchable thirst. Other indications of type 1 diabetes include frequent urination, bedwetting, hunger, fatigue and blurred vision. While more children are diagnosed with type 1, the current trajectory makes it likely that children diagnosed with type 2 could surpass those with type one in the next 10 years. It is a serious disease that requires lifelong daily discipline to manage it.

3. Every two hours spent in front of a television increases your risk of developing diabetes.

Watching TV can promote unhealthy behaviors such as poor food choices and inactivity, both of which contribute to a higher risk for type 2 diabetes. In fact, every two hours spent in front of the television increases the risk for developing the disease. Why? The longer you sit in front of the TV, the more likely you are to binge eat and subsequently gain weight, a major risk factor for type 2 diabetes.

4. Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in working-age American adults.

Without proper management, sugar will build up in the bloodstream. As it does that, it can damage tiny blood vessels in the retina, causing vision problems and possibly even resulting in blindness. Protect your vision by visiting your eye doctor every year and properly managing your diabetes through diet, exercising and health coaching.

5. More than 60 percent of all non-traumatic amputations of lower limbs occur in people with diabetes.

Diabetes doesn't only affect the body's insulin production; it can cause a multitude of other complications. Similar to the disease's effect on sight, it can damage the blood vessels in your lower legs and feet. Damage to those blood vessels can cause a loss of blood circulation and sensation (nerve damage). When that happens, foot ulcers may develop, which when not properly healed, can result in amputations.

6. Blood sugar levels change with the seasons.

If you've ever noticed your blood sugar spiking in the winter, it could be because of the drop in temperature. Diabetes researcher Wen Wei Liang discovered a link between seasonal changes and blood sugar levels. She found that sugar levels spike in the colder months and level off as the temperature increases. This is likely because blood vessels are more dilated during warm weather, allowing blood, insulin and glucose to travel more freely throughout the body.

7. People with diabetes are twice as likely to have depression.

Because diabetes requires a drastic overhaul of your life and daily habits, you may feel overwhelmed and perhaps even like an outsider among friends and family because your life is so "different." The added daily management and stress of life with diabetes year-round can trigger episodes of depression. Seek help if you feel depressed about your life with diabetes.

8. An artificial pancreas could revolutionize how people with type 1 diabetes manage their disease.

Technology is constantly changing the way we live. Currently, those with type 1 diabetes have to constantly monitor their blood glucose levels through constant testing and insulin injections. Even with proper monitoring, people with type 1 frequently experience periods of hypo-or-hyperglycemia. But they may soon be able to swap the conventional insulin pump for an artificial pancreas that would automatically keep blood glucose levels within a target range without around-the-clock tests. Studies have found that the artificial pancreas controlled diabetes patients' glucose levels better than insulin pumps resulting in their patients suffering fewer cases of hypoglycemia than those who use insulin pumps. Doctors hope the artificial pancreas will be available to those with diabetes before 2020.

Diabetes is a serious, life-changing disease. While there is no proven cause for diabetes, we do know that the risk for type 2 can be greatly reduced with improved lifestyle behavior and physical activity. Take the necessary precautions now because once you are diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, it will never go away. I can't emphasize enough how important it is to get qualified help and continually educate yourself. Knowledge is power in the daily management of diabetes.

