

DIABETES DEVASTATING THE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

Written by U.S Immigration News
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Diabetes Mellitus (DM) is a disease in which the body does not use sugar (glucose) normally. The body under normal circumstances uses glucose which it gets from food as a major source of energy. A chemical (hormone) produced in the body called insulin is required to adequately use up glucose as a source of energy. When there is no insulin, little insulin or when the cells of the body are somewhat resistant to insulin it results in high levels of sugar in the body which is what is called DM.

Types of Diabetes Mellitus

Type 1 diabetes: When someone has no insulin.

Type 2 Diabetes: These people do not produce enough insulin or their cells are resistant to insulin (even when they have high level).

Prediabetes: When people have abnormal sugar, but the level is not high enough to be termed a diabetic. This is also referred to as impaired fasting glucose.

Gestational Diabetes: Term used to describe people who have diabetes in pregnancy, but after delivery their blood sugar goes back to normal.

How common is Diabetes?

About 20.8 million people in the U.S. have Diabetes according to the American Diabetics Association, unfortunately about one-third of these people are not aware. Diabetes is common among Latinos, African-Americans and Native Americans.

Type 2 Diabetics are about 90-95 percent of all diabetics. Most of our discussion will focus on type 2 diabetes.

What are the Signs and Symptoms of Diabetes?

Type 2 DM develops slowly, so many people are diagnosed from routine blood screening. As it progresses, some symptoms may develop.

Excessive thirst: Sugar pulls blood out of the cells, so the person feels dry (dehydrated) and wants to drink more fluid.

Excessive urination: Results from drinking and water accompanying sugar as it is passed out in the urine.

Weight changes: Some people lose weight because the energy required by the body cells is not available. Others may gain weight from excessive eating.

Poor wound healing: Sores do not heal well in diabetics.

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Frequent infections: Vaginal and urine infections occur frequently in DM.

Other symptoms may also result from diabetes. A diabetic may experience some damage to certain organs in the body resulting in poor vision, tingling sensation of hands and feet depending on which part of the body is affected.

Life threatening presentation of DM may include starvation-like problems with excessive acid in the body (ketoacidosis) or at other times severe dehydration with very high levels of sugar presenting with confusion or even coma.

What are the risk factors for Diabetes?

Family history: DM is more common in people whose parent or siblings have the disease. However, other environmental factors also come into play in these groups of people.

Obesity: Excessive weight gain is a major risk factor for DM. In fact the current epidemic of obesity has significantly increased the number of people with diabetes. The body cells become more resistant to the action of insulin with increasing body fat.

Race: As discussed earlier diabetes is more common in Blacks, Hispanics and American Indians.

Gestational Diabetes: Many pregnant women who have diabetes in pregnancy later in life develop frank type 2 diabetes.

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Do you know?

- There is a 2 to 4 times increase in the risk of heart disease and stroke in diabetics which causes about 65% of deaths.
- High blood pressure affects about 73% of diabetics.
- Diabetic eye damage causes about 12,000-24,000 new cases of blindness each year.
- Diabetes accounted for 44% of new cases of kidney failure in 2002 statistics.
- Nervous system damage presenting in various forms occurs in about 60-70% of people with DM.
- 60% of amputations not related to injury are done because of diabetes.
- Spontaneous abortions occur in about 15-20% of pregnancies in diabetics.

American Medical News, August 2006

Complications of Diabetes

Diabetes affects almost every major part of the body. A lot of the damage is done on the vessels in the body.

Kidney (Nephropathy): Damage to the delicate numerous vessels that sieve (filter) in the kidney eventually can lead to kidney failure.

Eyes (retinopathy): DM causes cataract. It can also damage the vessels in the eye.

Nerve (neuropathy): DM damages the nerves possibly by affecting the tiny vessels that supply them with nourishment. The presentation will depend on which group of nerves is affected. It includes loss of feeling (numbness), vomiting, diarrhea, constipation (if it affects the digestive

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system), and feeling of internal heat and so on.

Heart: Diabetes increases the risk of heart attack, narrowing of blood vessels (atherosclerosis)

Alzheimer's disease: Diabetics have two times the risk as people of same age and sex to develop this type of dementia.

What can you do?

Maintain a healthy lifestyle: eat healthy, exercise regularly, and lose excess weight. Get regular check up as high blood sugar can be detected in blood work. If you have family members with diabetes, check routinely. If you have been diagnosed with Diabetes, take it serious and heed your doctor's advice.

Dr. Oluwatoyosi Dairo can be contacted at **Amazing Medical Services P.C. at 110-16 Sutphin Blvd., Jamaica, NY 11435 or by phone at (718) 526-7600.**

This article is for educational purposes and it is not intended to replace the advice of your doctor.

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