



*Diabetes and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders**

WHAT IS DIABETES?

- Diabetes is a chronic disease in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin, a hormone that is needed to convert sugar, starches, and other food into energy. It is associated with long-term complications that may affect a person's quality of life and is the leading cause of adult blindness, end-stage kidney disease, and amputations of the foot or leg due to nerve disease.
- Diabetes is one of the leading causes of death and disability in the United States. In 2002 the total cost (direct and indirect) of diabetes was \$132 billion.
- It is the fifth leading cause of death in Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders between the ages of 45 and 64.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF DIABETES?

- **Type 1 diabetes** (formerly called juvenile diabetes) results when the body's immune system attacks and destroys its own insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas. People with type 1 diabetes need daily injections of insulin to live. Symptoms of type 1 diabetes – increased thirst and urination, constant hunger, weight loss, blurred vision, and extreme fatigue – usually develop over a short period of time. If type 1 diabetes is not diagnosed and treated, a person can lapse into a life-threatening coma.
 - A small number of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans have type 1 diabetes.
- **Type 2 diabetes** (formerly called adult-onset diabetes) occurs when the body doesn't make enough insulin or cannot use the insulin it makes effectively. The symptoms of type 2 diabetes – feeling tired or ill, unusual thirst, frequent urination especially at night, weight loss, blurred vision, frequent infections, and slow-healing wounds – develop gradually and are not as noticeable as in type 1 diabetes.
 - This form of diabetes usually develops in adults over age 40 but is becoming more prevalent in children and adolescents. Most Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with diabetes have type 2 diabetes.
- **Gestational diabetes** develops during pregnancy. This type of diabetes disappears when the pregnancy is over, but women who have had gestational diabetes have a greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes later in their lives.

HOW MANY ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICANS HAVE DIABETES?

- Prevalence data for diabetes among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are limited. Some groups within this population are at increased risk for diabetes.
- In 2002, Native Hawaiians, Japanese, and Filipino residents of Hawaii aged 20 years or older were approximately 2 times as likely to have diagnosed diabetes as white residents of Hawaii of similar age¹.
- As in all populations, having risk factors for diabetes increases the chances that an Asian American or Pacific Islander will develop type 2 diabetes. These factors include: a family history of diabetes, gestational diabetes, impaired glucose tolerance, overweight, obesity, and lack of physical activity.
- In addition, the food choices of some Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have changed due to their migration to the United States and to modern times. Instead of their traditional plant- and fish-based diets, they are choosing foods with more animal protein, animal fats, and processed carbohydrates.

HOW DO DIABETES-RELATED COMPLICATIONS AFFECT ASIAN AMERICANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS?

- In general, age-standardized rates of blindness from diabetes for nonwhites are double those for non-Hispanic whites. However, no data on Asian and Pacific Islander Americans are available.
- Minority groups in general have higher rates of end-stage renal disease related to diabetes than do non-Hispanic white people. Among the minority groups, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have the lowest prevalence of end-stage renal disease. Minorities have better survival rates after treatment with dialysis than do non-Hispanic white people.

WHAT IS THE LINK BETWEEN CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE AND DIABETES?

- Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death for people with diabetes accounting for about 65 percent of all deaths.
- People with diabetes are 2 to 4 times more likely to have heart disease or suffer a stroke than people without diabetes.
- Middle-aged people with type 2 diabetes have the same high risk for heart attack as people without diabetes who already have had a heart attack.
- About 73 percent of people with diabetes also have high blood pressure.
- Smoking doubles the risk for heart disease in people with diabetes.

WHAT CAN ASIAN AMERICANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS DO TO PREVENT HEART DISEASE OR STROKE AND OTHER DIABETES COMPLICATIONS?

- Diabetes is a self-managed disease. People with diabetes must take responsibility for their day-to-day care.
- The chances of having diabetes complications can be reduced or delayed significantly by keeping blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels in the target range. The NDEP recommends the following targets for reducing risk of heart disease and stroke for people with diabetes (called the *ABCs of Diabetes*):
 - **Blood sugar**.....< 7 percent (check at least twice a year)
 - **Blood pressure**.....< 130/80 mmHg (check every doctor's visit)
 - **Cholesterol (LDL)**.....< 100 mg/dl (check once a year)
- People with diabetes can manage their disease by eating right amounts of a variety of healthy foods, getting regular physical activity, taking diabetes medicine as prescribed, and testing blood sugar levels.
- Community education and support programs can help people with diabetes and their families to manage their diabetes.

CAN TYPE 2 DIABETES BE PREVENTED?

- **YES!** The Diabetes Prevention Program, a research study sponsored by the National Institutes of Health, showed that people at high risk for diabetes were able to prevent the onset of the disease by losing a small amount of weight by eating a low fat, low calorie diet and regular physical activity.
- To prevent diabetes, DPP participants:
 - Lost 5 to 7 percent of their body weight. That's 10 to 15 pounds in a person that weighs 200 pounds.
 - Were physically active for 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. Most participants chose brisk walking.
 - Made healthier food choices and limited the amount of calories and fat in their diet.

WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?Where Can I Go for More Information?

For more information about preventing and controlling diabetes, can call 1-800-438-5383 or visit the National Diabetes Education Program's website at www.ndep.nih.gov.

*Adapted from National Diabetes Fact Sheet: General Information and national estimates on diabetes in the United States, 2003. Bethesda, MD. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, NIH, 2003 and Diabetes Overview and Diabetes in Asian and Pacific Islander Americans, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, National Institutes of Health.