

Think You're Doomed for Diabetes? Think Again! by **susan Burke March, MS, RD, LD/N, CDE**



Health experts predict that one in three Americans born today will develop type 2 diabetes (DM2), a direct consequence of being overweight and obesity; more than 80 percent of newly diagnosed type 2's are overweight or obese. Formerly classified as "juvenile" and "adult" diabetes, today, as younger people, even children, are increasingly diagnosed with "adult" diabetes, the terms have changed to include all people with either "type 1" (insulin-dependent) or "type 2" (non-insulin dependent) diabetes; The numbers are even higher if you consider people with pre-diabetes and pregnant women with gestational diabetes. Globally, more than 200 million people have DM2 which is estimated to increase to 330 million by 2025 (International Diabetes Foundation). Obesity increases risk for heart disease, hypertension and stroke, kidney failure and even some cancers.

On average, a person with DM2 goes undiagnosed for six years. The symptoms are generally silent at the start but chronic high blood glucose pervades and causes irreversible damage to eyes, peripheral nerves, kidneys and the heart. DM2 is the leading cause blindness, renal failure and non-traumatic amputation; heart disease and stroke are the primary causes of death.

According to the American Diabetes Association, diabetes mellitus is defined as fasting blood glucose of 126 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL) or greater. A diagnosis of pre-diabetes means blood glucose levels are higher than normal (a fasting blood glucose level between 100 and 125 mg/dl) but not yet diabetic.

Today's children are at risk of having a shorter lifespan than their parents. Type 2 diabetes is called an "epidemic" and like any other disease transmitted by personal contact, people are more likely to "catch" obesity if their family members and especially if their friends, are overweight or obese. However, the reverse is true as well, and if your friends and family take steps to get healthier and lose weight, that's contagious, too.

How successful you are at controlling blood glucose means either living with diabetes or getting very sick from it. For some, the diagnosis of diabetes is a lifesaver, the wakeup call that decides their fate. Family history increases risk and since we can't change our genes, our inherited risk for disease, it's necessary to take steps to prevent the disease. It's possible. We're all susceptible to our environment and challenges to healthy living are considerable, however, we can change how we live and function within our environment.

The Diabetes Prevention Program study conclusively showed that people with pre-diabetes can prevent, even reverse the symptoms of diabetes and improve insulin sensitivity. Subjects who lost just five to ten percent of their current weight and

incorporated just thirty minutes of moderate activity daily reduced their risk of getting diabetes by 58 percent. You can do this too. But, it's got to be permanent. It's not "lose weight and then go back to what you did before." It's losing weight by making permanent changes to your lifestyle with smart food and exercise strategies. A bonus: weight loss has other benefits, including lowered blood pressure, less stress on joints and tendons, improved sleep and making you feel more energized. Keep exercising, make smart food choices and you can prevent diabetes permanently.

How you choose to live your life may increase or lower your chances of getting type 2 diabetes. Here are some tips to prevent diabetes:

- * Write down personal goals for losing weight and increasing activity; Some include staying healthy to avoid diabetic complications; feeling more energetic; fitting into your clothes better. Post them on your bathroom mirror so you can see them every morning. Choose to Lose: Each week, choose one Food and Activity Goal. For example:
 - * I'll switch from whole milk to 2% milk (or from 2% to 1% or nonfat milk)
 - * I'll choose a low or no sugar added whole grain cereal
 - * I'll cut one unhealthy choice: for example, instead of burgers and fries at the fast food restaurant, I choose a lean-meat sub stuffed with veggies (hold the mayo and substitute mustard)
 - * I'll eliminate soda and juice and switch to water and a piece of fruit
 - * I'll read the Nutrition Facts labels on packaged foods; I'll educate myself on serving sizes, total calories, sugar and unhealthy fat content.
 - * If I choose a high calorie meal, my other meals will be high in fiber and low in fat and calories.
- * This week, I will walk for 10 minutes three mornings
- * This week, I will use half of my lunch break to walk (either outside or using the stairs).
- * This week, I will take an extra 20-minute walk on Saturday and Sunday
- * I'll get a pedometer and start logging my steps and increase my steps by 500 weekly.

Type 2 diabetes is a disease often passed down through generations. Take steps to make the changes to your lifestyle permanent and defy your fate. Before embarking on an exercise campaign, get a physician's exam. Visit the American Diabetes Association www.diabetes.org and the American Heart Association www.AmericanHeart.org for more valuable information about screening and prevention.

Registered and licensed dietitian Susan Burke March, MS, CDE, is the author of "Making Weight Control Second Nature: Living Thin Naturally," which offers a wealth of practical information, tips and strategies for people who are serious about taking a fat-free approach to their health. For more info, www.SusanBurkeMarch.com.

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