

Are You at Risk for Diabetes?

By Cornelia Pearson, RN, MN

Each year the American Diabetes Association designates the month of November as American Diabetes Month. The purpose of this designation is to make Americans more aware of the health risks of diabetes and prediabetes. Current data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that more than 100 million Americans are now living with diabetes or prediabetes. More than 34.2 million of these individuals have diabetes (10.5 percent of the U.S. population). Eighty-eight million American adults ages 18 years or older (34.5 percent of the U.S. adults) have pre-diabetes. These numbers place a tremendous burden on America's health care system as well as the individuals themselves.

Slightly more than fifty years ago 1.5 percent of Americans had diabetes. At that time the larger proportion of diabetics were type 1. Type 1 diabetes is thought to be caused by an autoimmune reaction that stops one's body from making insulin. The more prevalent type of diabetes, type 2, has been identified primarily as a life-style related disease. With type 2 diabetes the body does not use insulin well and cannot keep blood sugar at normal levels. Today about 5 percent of people with diabetes have Type 1 while 90 percent have Type 2. The remaining 5 percent have gestational diabetes which develops in pregnant women who have never had diabetes.

Prediabetes is a serious condition in which blood sugar levels are higher than normal but not high enough yet for the individual to be diagnosed as a type 2 diabetic. Ninety percent of individuals with prediabetes are not even aware that they are at risk for diabetes. Because individuals with prediabetes often go undiagnosed for long periods of time, they are at risk for the same health problems that impact those with diabetes.

An increase in the number of individuals with prediabetes and diabetes correlates directly with the increasing rate of obesity. In the mid-nineties 23 percent of the U.S. adult population was obese; CDC data currently show 16 states including three in the Southeastern Synod of the ELCA (Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee) whose obesity rate is now over 35 percent. Prediabetes and type 2 diabetes were at one time rare in youth but are becoming more common as an increasing number of children and adolescents are diagnosed as overweight or obese.

Individuals with diabetes are more likely to have more severe complications when infected with Covid-19. A recent research study shows that 40 percent of those who have died from Covid-19 had type 1 or type 2 diabetes. The risk of serious complication from Covid-19 however is likely to be lower if an individual's diabetes is well managed.

The National Diabetes Education Program states that "diabetes prevention is proven, possible and powerful." Yearly annual checkups, often overlooked by adults, can help to identify early signs of both prediabetes and Type 2 diabetes. In addition, lifestyle changes in the form of diet, exercise, weight loss and stress reduction can positively impact one's

health and make a difference in one's quality of life. Studies have found that individuals with prediabetes who lose weight, increase physical activity and eat a diet low in fat and calories can successfully prevent or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes and in some cases return their blood glucose levels to normal. A simple way to learn your risk of diabetes is to go to www.diabetes.org and take the Type 2 Diabetes Risk Test. If you are at risk, now is the time to take action to reduce your risk and strive for better health and wellness!

It is not too late to get an influenza shot and a Covid-19 vaccination!

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