

## **Diabetes ... A Dangerous Disease**

Diabetes is a dangerous disease because it secretly and slyly damages the body without the victim being aware that this is happening. By the time symptoms appear, body damage is already done, and may not be reversible. Untreated diabetes can lead to blindness, kidney or heart damage, and amputations.

November is American Diabetes month, designated as such to help bring awareness to every American of the dangers and seriousness of this disease. The American Diabetes Association tells us that diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States, and contributes to about 200,000 deaths each year.

### **What is diabetes?**

It is a chronic disease that has no cure. It is a disorder in which the body does not produce or use insulin properly. Insulin is a very important hormone in body function. It converts carbohydrates (foods such as sugar, potatoes, and bread) into usable form so it can be absorbed by the body through the bloodstream. When there are inadequate amounts of insulin in the body, or if the insulin that is produced is not properly used by the body, the carbohydrates, since they cannot be absorbed, collect in the blood vessels as sugar. When the sugar levels are consistently high, over a period of time, they damage the small and large blood vessels and create a variety of complications involving the eyes, kidneys, heart, immune systems, and other body parts (such as the hands and feet).

There are four types of diabetes:

- 1) Type 1 diabetes occurs when the body produces little or no insulin.
- 2) Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body produces insulin but in insufficient amounts, and/or the body does not properly use what insulin is produced.
- 3) Gestational diabetes develops during pregnancy and usually disappears when the pregnancy is over. It increases the risk of mother and child for developing diabetes in the future.
- 4) Miscellaneous specific types of diabetes result from genetic syndromes, surgery, drugs, malnutrition, infections, and other illnesses.

### **What are the symptoms of diabetes?**

At the onset, there are no symptoms. Diabetes sneaks around creating high blood sugar levels in the blood stream. This goes unnoticed until the body can no longer handle the high amounts of sugar in the blood stream. Then symptoms appear, but body damage has most probably occurred. Symptoms may include any or all of the following:

- Unusual thirst.
- Frequent urination.
- Weight loss.
- Tiredness, lack of energy.
- Blurred vision (diabetes is the leading cause of adult blindness).
- Tingling or numbness in hands or feet (more than one-half of all non-traumatic limb

amputations are due to diabetes).

- Frequent or recurring infections.
- Cuts and bruises that won't heal.

### **Diagnosis and risk factors**

Since there are no symptoms at the onset of diabetes, when it is most treatable and when complications can be avoided or delayed, the only positive way to diagnose diabetes in its early stages is through a glucose tolerance test. It is recommended that everyone over age 45 be screened for diabetes every three years or oftener if they are at risk for developing diabetes. Risk factors include having a history of diabetes in the family; being over age 45 or overweight; having high cholesterol, higher-than normal blood glucose levels, or high blood pressure; or heart disease.

### **Treatment**

Treatment consists of teamwork between the healthcare provider and the diabetic (the person with diabetes). The goal of treatment is to control blood glucose levels in order to prevent damage to the body, and to enable diabetics to live active, independent lives with a minimum of complications. Treatment includes:

**Medication:** Type 1 diabetes always requires daily injections of insulin. Type 2, gestational, and other types of diabetes may or may not require medications and/or insulin and may be controlled through diet, exercise, and stress reduction.

**Diet:** All types of diabetes require meal planning ... what you eat, when, and how much play critical roles in the control of blood sugar levels.

**Stress Reduction:** Stress causes chemical reactions in the body which can elevate blood sugars and make them harder to control ... therefore, reducing stress levels is a very important part of diabetes treatment.

**Exercise:** Regular exercise helps to lower blood sugar levels and reduce stress. Therefore, exercise is also a critical factor in diabetes treatment.

### **Prevention**

It is not known at this time how to prevent diabetes, although recent studies indicate that lifestyle and type 2 diabetes may be closely linked. This means then, that a healthy diet, exercise, and stress reduction may prevent or delay the onset of the disease.

### **Do not be deceived**

Lack of diabetes symptoms is not insurance that you don't have the disease. The American Diabetes Association estimates that there are 15.7 million people with diabetes who are unaware that they have the disease or the seriousness of it if they have it and it is left untreated. With facts like these, wouldn't it be wise to be screened for diabetes to ensure that you don't have it? Remember, it is easier to prevent body damage than to repair it.