

## **Diabetes ... A Silent Killer**

Diabetes is often referred to as a silent killer because it silently, without any warnings or signals, works unerringly and progressively to damage the body. Untreated, diabetes can lead to blindness, heart disease, stroke, kidney damage, and amputations.

As you are reading this, are you aware that, in this moment, there are more than 5.4 million people who have diabetes? They are unaware that they have it, and unaware that it is busy damaging their bodies. I hope you are not one of these persons.

### **Diabetes facts – the bad news**

- Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States.
- It contributes to approximately 200,000 deaths each year.
- It causes over 20,000 people to lose their sight each year.
- In 1995, over 28,000 people had to initiate treatment for end-stage renal disease (kidney failure) because of kidney damage caused by diabetes.
- Diabetes' healthcare costs in the United States alone exceed \$98 billion per year, (Statistics provided by American Diabetes Association.)

### **The good news ...**

With proper care and treatment, people with diabetes can live fairly-normal, active, satisfying lives.

### **What is diabetes exactly?**

It is a disease in which the body does not produce or use insulin properly. Insulin is a hormone needed to convert foods containing simple or complex carbohydrates, i.e., sugar, bread, potatoes, into usable form by the cells of the body. When diabetes is present, due of the insulin deficiency, the glucose instead of being absorbed by the cells and converted into energy, accumulates in the blood stream. This excess of glucose in the blood stream is what silently damages the body and causes symptoms to begin to develop.

### **Symptoms**

- Tiredness, lack of energy - caused because the cells are not receiving the fuel they need. The glucose remains in the blood stream instead of going into the cells.
- Weight loss - caused because the body is deprived of its energy. The body begins to "starve" causing the person to feel hungry and eat more, but the weight is not regained.
- Frequent urination - the kidneys, in an attempt to flush the excess, unused glucose out of the blood stream, draws water out of the body and passes it into the bladder, causing frequent urination.
- Excessive thirst - developed by the body in an attempt to replace the water drawn out of the body by the kidneys.
- Other symptoms caused by the excess glucose in the blood stream: blurred vision,

cuts/bruises that are slow to heal, nervousness, itchy skin, nausea, vomiting, leg pain, recurring infections:

### **Types of diabetes**

- 1) Type 1 - an auto-immune disease in which the body does not produce any insulin. It occurs most often in children and young adults.
- 2) Type 2 - a metabolic disorder resulting from the body's inability to make enough insulin, or to use it properly.
- 3) Gestational - develops during pregnancy, disappears when the pregnancy is over.
- 4) Other - specific types of diabetes resulting from genetic syndromes, surgery, drugs, malnutrition, infections, and other illnesses.

### **Who can get diabetes?**

Anyone. There are no set rules for developing or not-developing the disease. And, there are no specific causes, although studies indicate that some people are at greater risk than others for developing the disease.

### **Who is at greater risk for developing diabetes?**

People:

- with a history of diabetes in their family.
- over 45 years of age.
- who are overweight.
- who do not get enough exercise, or exercise regularly.
- with high blood pressure.

### **Diagnosis**

The only positive way to diagnose diabetes is through a glucose tolerance test given through your healthcare professional. If the results indicate that you have diabetes, treatment must start immediately. If the results are normal, it is recommended that you repeat the test every three years. If you are in the greater-risk group (see above), it's wise to repeat the test every year just to be on the safe side. The earlier the disease is detected and treated, the less damage it can do to the body, and the fewer complications there will be down the road.

### **Treatment**

There is no cure for diabetes, but the disease can be managed so the diabetic (person with diabetes) can live a normal, active life.

Management is achieved through teamwork between the healthcare provider and the diabetic. The goal is to control blood glucose levels through medication, diet, and exercise. The final objective is to control the disease instead of letting it control (limit) you.