

World Diabetes Day – A Time to Reflect
Or National Diabetes Month – A Time to Reflect

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In 1922, Frederick Banting and team announced the discovery of insulin in Ontario, Canada. Parents of children with type 1 diabetes, lined up at the clinic for the chance to receive this life saving hormone. On November 14th, we celebrate the birthday of Dr. Banting and reflect on the state of diabetes in the U.S. The number of Americans with diabetes continues to increase, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). So does the number of Americans with prediabetes, a condition that increases their risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Diabetes affects 8.3% of all Americans and 11.3% of adults age 20 and older. One third of all Americans have diabetes and do not know they have the disease.

Looking into the future, the CDC estimates that as many as 1 in 3 U.S. adults could have diabetes by 2050 if current trends continue. Type 2 diabetes, in which the body gradually loses its ability to use and produce insulin, accounts for 90% to 95% of cases.

What factors are causing this increasing rate of diabetes? The answer isn't that straightforward. Certainly, our increasing waistlines are associated with higher rates of diabetes. In the United States 60% of Americans are overweight or obese. But lack of exercise also increases the risk. A recent study demonstrated that Americans burn off 100 less calories a day than they used to at their jobs. This equals an extra gain of a pound a month. And as with other industrialized countries, we have less natural activity in our daily lives. Research shows that in societies where people integrate daily walking and physical activity, rates of diabetes and other chronic diseases are lower. Additionally, scientists are discovering that the types of bacteria in our gut may influence our weight and risk of expressing diabetes. And of course, genes play a major role in whether or not a person expressed diabetes or not. Over 30 different genes have been identified that contribute to type 2 diabetes expression and scientists are discovering more all the time. Other risk factors for type 2 diabetes include older age, family history, having diabetes while pregnant, and race/ethnicity.

Given that the rate of diabetes is on the rise, what action can those with prediabetes or diabetes take to keep living healthy?

The good news is, if you have prediabetes, according to the Diabetes Prevention Program Study, you can make changes in your life to lower your risk of getting diabetes. This study demonstrated that if you exercise for 150 minutes a week (5 times a week for 30 minutes), and lose 5-7% of your body weight, you can lower your risk of getting diabetes by 58%. So now is the time to get started with your new healthier lifestyle.

If you have diabetes, be reassured that it doesn't automatically lead to complications such as blindness, heart disease, kidney and foot problems. People with diabetes can dramatically reduce their chances of getting complications by paying attention to the ABCs of diabetes management. The A stands for A1c. A1c is a blood test that determines the average blood sugar for the past 3 months. According to the American Diabetes Association (ADA), the A1c level should be kept less than 7%. The B stands for Blood Pressure. High blood pressure can increase the risk of heart and vessel disease. The ADA sets the goal for blood pressure at less than 130/80. Finally, the C stands for cholesterol. Pay special attention to your LDL cholesterol, since high levels of this cholesterol increase your risk of heart and vessel disease. Work with your provider to keep your LDL less than 100mg/dl and even lower if you have a history of heart disease.

If you are concerned you may have diabetes, ask your provider to check your blood sugar levels. If the results are higher than normal or if you already have diabetes, work with your provider to develop a plan of action. Since you will be living with your diabetes everyday, learn as much as you can about actions you can do to keep your diabetes under control. A great way to learn about diabetes is to take a class or participate in a support group. Not only will you learn from diabetes experts, but you will also be able to ask others living with diabetes about their experiences and ideas.

List information about YOUR diabetes resources and contact info here