

DIABETES AND AFRICAN AMERICANS

*Office of Services to the Aging
State of Michigan*

Diabetes is a chronic disease that affects the lives of many Americans and African Americans are no exception. Diabetes can occur at any age and has no cure although some types respond to insulin. Individuals with diabetes are at a much greater risk for cardiovascular disease.

The numbers

Nearly 12% of all African Americans over 20 years of age have diabetes but one-third of these people have not been diagnosed. Nearly 25% of African Americans age 65-74 have diabetes. African Americans are nearly twice as likely to have diabetes as non-Hispanic whites.

The risks and complications

Anyone with diabetes is 2-4 times more likely to have heart disease. Complications with high blood pressure, blindness, kidney disease, strokes, and amputations are associated with diabetes. African Americans are twice as likely to suffer from diabetes related blindness, kidney failure and amputations.

Prevention

There are two types of diabetes. Type I is usually diagnosed by the time a person reaches age 35-40. There is no way to prevent this type of diabetes. But good glucose control, a healthy diet and regular exercise are essential in preventing the many complications of diabetes.

Type II diabetes is usually diagnosed in middle age but can occur earlier. This type is highly associated with being overweight. The best way to prevent this type of diabetes is to control weight with a healthy diet and regular exercise.

Reducing risk of complications—An Issue of Control!

Regular physical exams are critical in the early diagnosis and treatment of diabetes. This is especially important after age 55.

- **Good glucose control!** This the most important thing a diabetic can do to reduce risks of diabetes. For every one point in reducing A1C (a measure of long-term glucose control) risks of eye, kidney and nerve disease decreases by 40%.
- **Blood pressure control!** Have your blood pressure checked regularly, take your blood pressure medication as prescribed, control your weight and include moderate daily exercise. Staying in good blood pressure control can help reduce risk of cardiovascular complications by 50%!
- **Control blood lipids.** If you can keep cholesterol levels at healthy levels you can reduce risk of heart disease. Watch your intake of fat, saturated fats, and simple sugars.

- Schedule regular check-ups with your physician so that early diagnosis and treatment for complications can be initiated.

Other tips

- If you smoke, STOP! Remember that smoking is the single most preventable cause of all disease. Smoking with diabetes greatly increases your risk of heart attack.
- Eat a healthy, well balanced diet. Include plenty of fruits and vegetables, low-fat meats, low-fat dairy products, whole grains. Limit sweets, high fat goodies, alcohol, and salty foods.
- Watch your weight! Eat a calorie controlled diet so that you can keep your weight in a healthy range.
- Include regular exercise. Check with your health care professional for clearance to start a daily exercise program.