

### **DIABETES: TEXANS AT RISK**

One in fourteen Texans has diabetes, a serious disease that can lead to heart disease, kidney disease, blindness, and even death. Almost half of these 700,000 Texans do not know they have it.

Diabetes is a disease in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin. When food is eaten, it is converted to glucose (sugar) in the bloodstream. Then, it travels to the cells, where it is used as energy. Insulin is the hormone that allows that conversion to take place. In a person with diabetes, insulin is either not present or is not effective. Without insulin, the glucose in the bloodstream rises to dangerous proportions. The body attempts to remove the sugar by spilling it into the urine. That is how diabetes is often discovered.

#### **Type I Diabetes**

The most severe form of diabetes is the one that usually strikes children, type I, or insulin-dependent diabetes. To survive, people with this form of diabetes must take daily insulin injections. Although it does control the disease, insulin is not a cure.

Each month in the U.S., type I diabetes strikes 1,000 children between the ages of five and sixteen. The real danger is that the symptoms will be misdiagnosed as the flu. Since most new cases of diabetes in children occur during flu season (November through March) and the symptoms mimic those of the flu, the disease is often misdiagnosed and therefore untreated. Symptoms of insulin-dependent diabetes include frequent urination, unusual thirst and extreme hunger, rapid weight loss, weakness, fatigue, irritability, nausea and vomiting. Unlike the flu, however, the symptoms appear over a period of three to four weeks.

If diabetes is not treated properly, a child's blood sugar could go out of control, leading to diabetes ketoacidosis, which could then lead to diabetic coma and even death. If your child is experiencing the symptoms listed above, please see your doctor immediately.

What if you discover that your child does have diabetes? First of all, don't panic. Although insulin has not cured diabetes, with proper medical care, diet, and exercise your child should be able to lead a long, healthy life.

The most important thing about having diabetes in the family is not to let diabetes become the center of everyone's life. Incorporate diabetes management into your lifestyle; don't change your lifestyle to fit

diabetes. The more routine and natural diabetes management becomes, the better your child will adjust.

#### **Type II Diabetes**

About 90 percent of people with diabetes have noninsulin-dependent diabetes (type II), which usually develops in people who are over the age of 40 and who are overweight. It can usually be controlled with proper diet and exercise, although oral medication or insulin may be needed.

In type II diabetes, the pancreas still may be producing insulin, but it is not being used effectively.

Symptoms of type II can include blurred vision, tingling or numbness in the feet or hands, frequent skin infections or itchy skin, slow healing of cuts or bruises, and drowsiness. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, see your doctor immediately.

What do you do if you are diagnosed as having type II diabetes? First, lose weight. It is estimated that about 90 percent of people taking oral hypoglycemic drugs could stop if they lost weight. Of course, in addition to losing weight, you should begin a regular exercise program under the direction of your doctor.

#### **Managing Type I and Type II Diabetes**

There are exciting innovations in diabetes research every day. One of the newest techniques, already in use, is an insulin pump that is usually worn on the belt of the patient. It continually pumps small amounts of insulin through a plastic tube and a needle inserted in the skin for up to three days. It replaces frequent injections and is meant to imitate the secretion of insulin by a healthy pancreas.

Other techniques that are meeting with success and further research include transplanting insulin-producing cells and using insulin eyedrops to replace injections. Both techniques are being tested and will not be available for years. Still, it is exciting to think that someday they and other innovations could be common practice.

The American Diabetes Association is the nation's leading voluntary health organization supporting diabetes research and education. The Texas Affiliate is made up of 22 active chapters and more than 10,000 members. For more information, contact the ADA, Texas Affiliate, at 1-800-252-8233. (In Austin, 512-343-6981.)

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