

African americans and diabetes

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“ These life-threatening consequences strike people with diabetes more than twice as often as they do others” (American Diabetes Association, 2006). Further complications associated with diabetes include kidney disease, blindness, and the threat of amputations. This health concern currently affects about 16 million people in the United States with an estimated five million of those unaware of their condition. African Americans face heightened risks of contracting diabetes.

Although about 33 percent of people with the illness are unaware of their condition, nearly three million or almost 12 percent of the African American population over 20 years of age suffer from symptoms of diabetes. Because of this, African Americans have been identified as being at greater risk than those of Anglo descent to suffer macro-vascular problems such as strokes and heart disease. “ African Americans are 1.6 times more likely to have diabetes than non-Latino whites. Twenty-five percent of African Americans between the ages of 65 and 74 have diabetes” (American Diabetes Association, 2006). The immune system, the environment, and genetics are factors that influence Type One diabetes but the risk factors are more clearly defined for Type Two diabetes. These include obesity, physical inactivity, elderly people, family history of diabetes, a past history of gestational diabetes and those with a weakened tolerance for glucose. Ethnicity is another risk factor. “ African Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, American Indians, and some Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are at particularly high risk for Type Two diabetes” (American Diabetes Association, 2006).

Despite the biological impediments that cannot be altered, African Americans can take measures to combat this genetic predisposition. Those African American diabetics who are overweight when they begin the nutritional program may require more initial calories until their weight drops to a more normal level. The reasoning is that too rapid of a weight loss can be very unhealthy and it takes additional calorie intake to sustain a larger body frame. Gender also plays a role in determining a proper program as males generally possess a greater muscle mass than females and consequently may require a higher intake of calories. Because muscle uses up more calories per hour than does fat, people who are not physically active will have less need for caloric intake, a good reason for everyone, and especially those with diabetes, to exercise regularly and build-up muscle mass. In other words, if you like to eat, supplement it with proportional amounts of exercise. There are different theories regarding the most effective diet but the fact that diet is very important in controlling the symptoms of diabetes is indisputable (American Diabetes Association, 2006).

While there is no known cure for the disease, diabetes can be managed effectively with proper treatment. Diabetics are able to significantly decrease the risks of complications due to the disease if they are willing to educate themselves then apply that knowledge to their daily lives. Lack of medical insurance, genetics and lifestyle habits contribute to a higher rate of diabetes in African Americans who are about twice more likely to contract the condition than other ethnicities. Improved access to medical care and education is the best method to combat the ethnic imbalance of diabetes.

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