

## The Nitty-Gritty of Diabetes

By Nina Lovern, Diabetes Education (Perspectives) Coordinator, Pardee Hospital

What is diabetes? This chronic disease results when your body can no longer produce enough insulin, or your cells can't use the insulin you produce well enough to keep your blood sugar level. Insulin is a hormone that is needed to convert sugar, starches and other food into energy needed for daily life.

What signs and symptoms provide a warning of diabetes? Classic symptoms include frequent urination, excessive thirst, increasing tiredness, irritability, blurry vision, extreme hunger, and difficulty healing. By detecting symptoms early, and beginning an education and treatment plan, people with diabetes can live a full and healthy life without suffering complications that fifty years ago were considered an inevitable consequence of living with the disease. Diabetic complications are disabling health problems that, if not managed, can lead to premature death. Your eyes, kidneys, nerves and heart can all be affected by poor blood sugar control. Remember, control matters! It is very important to learn as much as you can about diabetes so you can care for yourself and stay healthy. Self-management matters!

Are you one of the estimated 24 million people in the United States with diabetes? Do you have friends or family members with this disease? Diabetes affects every age group and every race - with higher development risk in African-American, American Indian or Latino populations. The most common type of diabetes affecting about 90% of people with the disease is called Type 2. We used to think of this as a disease of aging, typically showing up after 5 or 6 decades of life, but unfortunately, this trend is changing. Now we are seeing diabetes developing in our youth. What is causing this? We know that Type 2 diabetes has a hereditary component. According to the American Diabetes Association, if you have Type 2 diabetes, the risk of your child getting diabetes is 1 in 7 if you were diagnosed before age 50 and 1 in 13 if you were diagnosed after age 50. Some scientists believe that a child's risk is greater when the parent with Type 2 diabetes is the mother. If both you and your partner have Type 2 diabetes, your child's risk is about 1 in 2. But, you should understand that it's more than your genes – it is environment – or lifestyle - that contributes to the rising trend. Children learn poor dietary and activity habits from their parents and often carry them into adulthood.

Pre-diabetes is also on the rise. In fact, it is estimated that close to 60 million people in the United States have pre-diabetes, and it is showing up at a much earlier age. This is a “red flag warning” to each of us that without a change in dietary habits and lifestyle, diabetes is right around the corner. Clinical research indicates that damage to the heart and circulatory system can begin as early as the pre-diabetes stage due to the odds of also having hypertension (high blood pressure), dyslipidemia (abnormal blood fat results), and obesity. Studies prove that by lowering weight 5 – 10 percent and participating in 30 minutes of daily exercise, people can reduce or delay the onset of Type 2 diabetes by about 58 percent. As a result of taking action early on, some people can actually see blood sugar return to normal. “Normal blood glucose” is defined as a fasting plasma glucose result (drawn from your arm, not your finger) of less than 100 mg/dl. If the number falls between 101 and 125 mg/dl, this is considered “pre-diabetes.” A diagnosis of diabetes occurs when the fasting plasma glucose result is 126 mg/dl or greater on two separate blood sugar tests.

*Perspectives* Diabetes Self-Management Education Program at Pardee's Rehab and Wellness Center provides education and guidance for patients and families by certified diabetes educators. You learn how healthy eating, activity, medications and self-monitoring work together to control diabetes. The educators follow national standards of care and support you by teaching key behaviors that promote successful self-management. If you have been diagnosed with diabetes, talk with your doctor today about enrolling you in *Perspectives*.