

Diabetes: Are Hispanics/Latinos at Greater Risk?

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is one of the leading causes of death and disability in the United States. It is the fifth leading cause of death among Hispanics/Latinos in the United States. Persons with diabetes have a higher risk for secondary health conditions, including coronary heart disease, blindness, kidney disease, peripheral vascular disease and amputations.

Diabetes is a disease in which the body does not have enough insulin or does not use insulin the way it should. Insulin is a hormone that converts sugar in the blood into energy. In a person with diabetes, the blood sugar stays in the bloodstream and cells become starved for energy. The excess sugar in the blood causes problems throughout the body such as heart disease, stroke, hypertension, blindness, kidney problems, and loss of sensation in the feet and legs.

Are Hispanics/Latinos at greater risk for diabetes?

Hispanics are more likely than the general population to develop diabetes. It is estimated that 2.5 million, or 10.4 percent of Hispanic and Latino Americans aged 20 and older have diabetes. Hispanics also are more likely to have undiagnosed diabetes than non-Hispanic whites and non-Hispanic blacks. Nearly half of Hispanic children born in the year 2000 are likely to develop diabetes during their lives. Risk factors include: being overweight; having a parent, brother, or sister with diabetes; being older than age 45; having had diabetes when pregnant; and being Hispanic/Latino, Alaska Native, American Indian, African American, Asian American or Pacific Islander.

What are the symptoms of diabetes?

A person with diabetes may have no symptoms at all, but some common symptoms include:

- being very thirsty
- being very hungry
- having dry, itchy skin
- urinating often
- losing weight without trying

- feeling very tired
- losing feeling or having tingling in the feet
- having sores that are slow to heal
- having blurry vision

How is diabetes diagnosed?

A health care provider can diagnose diabetes by performing a screening test to measure the amount of sugar in your blood. The three most common tests are the fasting blood sugar, the oral glucose tolerance test, and the random blood sugar test.

Can diabetes be cured or prevented?

Diabetes cannot be cured, but it is possible to control diabetes through medical management and lifestyle changes such as eating a healthy diet and getting daily exercise. Smoking increases the risk of problems associated with diabetes such as stroke and heart disease. Therefore, if you smoke, get help to quit. Certain types of diabetes can be prevented. Studies have shown that moderate amounts of exercise and a healthy diet can delay and possibly prevent Type 2 (non-insulin dependent or adult-onset) diabetes. If a person develops diabetes despite these efforts, many complications of diabetes can be prevented through careful monitoring and working with a health care provider.

Where can I get more information?

American Diabetes Association:

<http://www.diabetes.org/in-my-community/programs/latino-programs/>

National Diabetes Education Program:

<http://www.ndep.nih.gov/i-have-diabetes/tengodiabetes.aspx>

National Alliance for Hispanic Health:

<http://www.hispanichealth.org/programs/diabetes.aspx>

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/projects/index.htm>

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