

You're at Risk for Diabetes If...

November is American Diabetes Month



Diabetes is more widespread than most people realize. An estimated 18.2 million Americans have diabetes, but only 13 million have been diagnosed.

By the time the remaining 5 million are diagnosed, they will have had diabetes for an average of five to seven years, says Davida F. Kruger, M.S.N., R.N., a past officer of the American Diabetes Association (ADA). "The condition is often missed in routine exams because it can develop slowly and shows no initial symptoms."

Diabetes is more common in African Americans, Latinos, American Indians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders. If you are a member of one of these ethnic groups, you need to pay extra attention to the following test to see if you are at risk for having diabetes. Concerning the test, if a statement is not true, add a zero. If a

statement is true, add the number of points noted in parentheses after the statement. Then add up your total score:

- I am a woman who has had a baby weighing more than nine pounds at birth. (1)
- I have a sister or brother with diabetes. (1)
- I have a parent with diabetes. (1)
- My weight is equal to or above that listed in the chart below (see end of article). (5)
- I am under 65 years of age AND I get little or no exercise. (5)
- I am between 45 and 64 years old. (5)
- I am 65 years old or older. (9)

Scoring

- 10 or more points: You are at high risk for having diabetes. Only your health care provider can check to see if you have diabetes. See yours soon and find out.
- 3-9 points: You are probably at low risk for having diabetes now. Keep your risk low by losing weight if you are overweight.

Most health care providers test blood sugar or glucose as part of an annual exam, but don't hesitate to ask for this test if you're concerned. A fasting blood-sugar level of more than 100 mg/dl indicates you may need additional tests for diabetes.

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"Once people know they have diabetes, they can control their glucose to improve their long-term health," Ms. Kruger says. "Research has shown that eye disease can occur within five years of the disease's onset and kidney disease starts to develop after 15 years if diabetes isn't well controlled. But a person's risk of having diabetic complications is reduced by 65 percent if the condition is well controlled."

The ADA recommends that people with diabetes use the following strategies to control their glucose and their symptoms:

Diet

Eat more fresh fruits, vegetables, lean meats, and fish and eat fewer high-fat foods. Carbohydrates and foods that contain small amounts of natural sugar can be part of a well-balanced diet. The ADA suggests seeing a registered dietitian to help plan meals.

Exercise

Exercise helps to decrease blood glucose and promotes weight loss. Physical activity is one of the best treatments for type 2 diabetes, and regular physical activity can also play an important role in preventing the disease from developing in the first place. Ask your doctor to suggest an exercise program that's right for you.

Medication

Take medication if your doctor prescribes it. People with diabetes who need medication have a variety of choices to lower their blood-sugar levels.

"Lowering blood glucose isn't an all-or-nothing proposition," Ms. Kruger says. "People with diabetes should set realistic goals for lowering their blood sugar, because any sustained lowering of blood-sugar levels helps avoid diabetic complications."

At-Risk Weight Chart

Height is without shoes. Weight is in pounds without clothing.

Height - 4'10"; weight - 129
Height - 4'11"; weight - 133
Height - 5'0"; weight - 138
Height - 5'1"; weight - 143
Height - 5'2"; weight - 147
Height - 5'3"; weight - 152
Height - 5'4"; weight - 157
Height - 5'5"; weight - 162
Height - 5'6"; weight - 167
Height - 5'7"; weight - 172
Height - 5'8"; weight - 177
Height - 5'9"; weight - 182
Height - 5'10"; weight - 188
Height - 5'11"; weight - 193
Height - 6'0"; weight - 199
Height - 6'1"; weight - 204
Height - 6'2"; weight - 210
Height - 6'3"; weight - 216
Height - 6'4"; weight - 221

If you weigh the same as or more than the amount listed for your height, you may be at risk for diabetes.

For more information please visit:

www.diabetes.org



Planning the Care of Your Aging Parents

November is National Family Caregivers Month

If your parents are in their golden years, keep in mind that even gold can lose some of its glow with the inevitable effects of old age -- and sooner or later, older loved ones will need assistance.

"It's never too early to start planning for their future care," says Virginia Morris, author of *How to Care for Aging Parents*. "Many children of aging parents wait until there's a crisis, and then they're left scrambling for mediocre options. Everyone -- especially those who live far away from their parents and work full time -- can benefit from being prepared and planning far ahead."

Advance Planning Means:

- Making sure legal documents have been drawn up, including an up-to-date will, a durable power of attorney, a living will, and a health-care proxy.
- Researching the housing options and services available in your parents' community.

- Discussing with your loved ones how you can help with their future housing, financial, and medical-care needs.
- Asking them about growing old -- "what are their concerns, their worries, what's important to them, how can you help them?" says Ms. Morris.

"Don't parent your parent," she urges. "The point isn't to control your parents' life, but to help them maintain control. Your role is to give them as much autonomy and independence as possible."

When It's Time to Act

One day, all the signs may point to the need for you to actively step in to assist your parents. Telltale signs include:

- Your loved ones start losing weight.
- They stop washing their hair or clothing.
- They drink more alcohol.
- They leave piles of unpaid bills on their desk.
- They let food grow moldy in the refrigerator.
- They start walking unsteadily.

"Trust your instincts," Ms. Morris says. "Anything that strikes you as 'Hmmm, is this OK?' probably isn't OK."

Important First Steps

Immediately open a line of communication with your parents' doctors so you can discuss your concerns. And if you live far away, obtain a copy of your parents' local phone book so you can contact care providers and other resources.

Defining Your Limits

Many adult children find their first steps into caregiving responsibilities are like walking into quicksand. If you don't manage your time well or haven't planned in advance, you can become mired in never-ending obligations, such as daily chores and care, handling legal or financial issues or lining up health-care providers.

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"You need to set limits," says Ms. Morris. "Establishing limits doesn't mean you don't love your parents or that you can't take good care of them. But you're not going to be any good to them if you're depressed, angry, or sick -- you have to take care of yourself."

To do this, Ms. Morris suggests you:

- Decide what you can reasonably do to help, then stick with that plan. If you decide you'll visit your mother twice per week, help her manage her finances and investigate local resources, then that's what you should do. Get help for other needs as they arise.
- Accept help early on -- from relatives, friends, neighbors, churches and synagogues, senior centers, or home-care agencies. "Set up a whole support network -- don't be the only person doing this," says Ms. Morris.
- Take care of yourself. Get exercise, get enough sleep, pay attention to your diet, and go to support-group meetings for caregivers.

"People often push themselves until they become burnt out and angry at their siblings, and their work starts to suffer. I have seen several times where caregivers ended up in the hospital because they were so wiped out," says Ms. Morris. "This can be a consuming job -- it's crucial to take care of yourself."

For more information:

www.thefamilycaregiver.org



Estate Planning: Get Organized Now

Estate planning isn't just about legal issues -- there are practical ones as well. After you die, many of the tasks and decisions your loved ones will have to handle usually aren't covered by basic estate planning documents. You can save them some headache by making your wishes known on such issues as:

- Who should be notified of your death?
- Do you want a funeral or a memorial ceremony? If so, what type? Who should attend? Do you want people to send flowers, or would you prefer donations to charity?
- Did you prepare a will or living trust? Where did you keep them?
- Do you own a life insurance policy, pension, annuity, or retirement account? Where are the documents stored?
- Do you have bank accounts? Do you have a safe deposit box? Where are the records?
- Do you own stocks, bonds, or money in mutual funds? Where are the records?
- Do you own real estate? Where are the deeds?

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Most of us carry this information around in our heads and never discuss it with our family members in a comprehensive way. So talk to your loved ones about these items, otherwise they may be left to make decisions without information you would've liked them to have.

Avoid Unnecessary Losses

Costly or painful losses can result from a failure to organize your affairs. Stocks, bonds, bank accounts, real estate, and insurance policy benefits may go unclaimed and be turned over to the state government. This happens surprisingly often. Each year, millions of dollars go into state treasuries because the rightful property owners couldn't be found.

On a more personal level, relatives or friends may not be promptly informed of a death, and valuable pieces of family history may not be passed down to future generations.

Fortunately, losses like these can be avoided with a little bit of planning, sorting, and organizing.

Organize Your Information

Making things easier for your family is not difficult, but it may be time-consuming. It's best to break the task into manageable sections and take it one step at a time. Start by thinking about some broad categories of information:

- funeral plans (arrangements and whom to notify)
- insurance policies
- wills, living trusts, deeds, and other important documents
- pensions and retirement accounts
- bank, money market, and mutual fund accounts
- stocks and bonds
- items in safes, safe deposit boxes, and other locked or hidden places, and

- family history, including the location of photographs, heirlooms, and other irreplaceable items.

Then think about organizing this information in a way that will help your family handle your affairs after your death. You can structure the information any way you like -- even some scribbled notes left in an accessible location are better than nothing -- but if you have the time and energy for it, consider a more thorough approach. However you choose to organize your affairs, what's most important is that you create a clear, easily accessible system that will light the way for your family and friends.

When you've got everything in order, be sure to store your information in a safe place. You might consider keeping everything in a fireproof metal box, file cabinet, or home safe. Also, be sure to discuss your new records with those closest to you. Your careful work won't help them unless they know where to find important papers when the time comes.