



COLORADO ACADEMY OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS

2224 S. Fraser St., Unit 1, Aurora, CO 80014
Phone: 303-696-6655 Toll-Free: 800-468-8615 Fax: 303-696-7224

Myths & Facts: DIABETES

The incidence of diabetes is on the rise. Research has indicated that since the year 2000, 1 in 3 children in the United States will develop diabetes. Clearly this is a very important disease that effects many people and can lead to life-threatening illnesses or at the very least life-altering problems.

MYTH: Having a "sweet tooth" will lead to diabetes.

FACT: A high intake of sweet foods and beverages will not necessarily lead to diabetes. In Type II diabetes, also referred to as Adult Onset Diabetes, weight gain can be one of the most important influences on glucose metabolism and specifically insulin sensitivity. Obesity actually reduces the body's sensitivity to insulin, therefore making the pancreas work harder. Eventually the pancreas, which produces the insulin, is unable to adequately produce enough insulin. As a result, blood sugar rises and a person can develop diabetes. A diet high in sweets is not healthy in general, however a high calorie diet can lead to obesity and thus diabetes.

MYTH: I will develop diabetes because I have a family member with diabetes.

FACT: Certainly having a family history of diabetes increases your risk for diabetes, but it does not mean you will develop diabetes. Family history of Type I diabetes does increase your risk, thus making it important to make sure your lifestyle choices reduce your risk. Seeing your family physician on a regular basis to assess your risks is important. With Type II diabetes, maintaining a healthy diet and including exercise reduces your risk for obesity. As a result, this decreases your chances of developing diabetes. Some possible symptoms of diabetes include excessive thirst or urination, fatigue, acute vision changes or even unexplained weight loss.

MYTH: Having diabetes means I should never have fruit.

FACT: Having diabetes does not mean you cannot eat fruit. In fact, many fruits have a low glycemic index as do most vegetables. The glycemic index refers to a food's effect on your blood sugar soon after you eat that food. You want to eat foods with a low glycemic index. **Examples of foods with a high glycemic index include:** sugar, bread (both white and wheat), white potatoes, white rice and most breakfast cereals. Your body processes these carbohydrates more quickly, thus causing an abrupt rise in your blood sugar. **Examples of foods with a low glycemic index include:** rye and pumpernickel bread, sweet potatoes and yams, bran cereals and oatmeal, brown rice, and surprisingly pasta. Beans have a low glycemic index and also have high fiber. A high fiber diet, referred to as vegetable roughage, is also a benefit to diabetes and general good health. Your body processes food with a low glycemic index more slowly, thus your blood sugar is not effected as dramatically.

MYTH: Once I have diabetes, it can never be reversed.

FACT: Currently diabetes is classified as Type I or Juvenile Onset or Type II also known as Adult Onset. In a person with Type I diabetes, the pancreas does not have the ability to make enough insulin. These

patients generally will need to be on insulin along with dietary measures to correct their diabetes. In Type II diabetes, the body becomes insulin resistant and the pancreas is unable to produce enough insulin. These individuals generally need a combination of diet, exercise and weight loss. Medications and sometimes insulin are often needed to correct their diabetes. As we noted previously, obesity is a big risk factor for Type II diabetes. The more obese you are, the more insulin resistant you are. Thus, weight loss can improve and essentially "reverse" the disease. A healthy diet together with exercise in many cases will allow the body to process the sugar more effectively. As a result, many people can reduce or even stop their medication and if on insulin, possibly reduce or stop taking insulin.

MYTH: There is a link between Diabetes and Alzheimer's disease.

FACT: We know diabetes damages blood vessels. This is why kidney disease, and eye disease, including blindness and peripheral vascular disease which can lead to loss of limbs, are related to diabetes, especially if poorly controlled. It has long been known that diabetes can lead to "vascular dementia," a type of dementia secondary to damaged blood vessels in the brain. Many people with cognitive decline and diabetes have changes in the brain that are both consistent with vascular dementia and Alzheimer's disease. The elevated blood glucose and high insulin levels in Type II diabetes may play a role in the development of vascular dementia. Ongoing research is underway to find the link between the two diseases. Greater understanding of this association may help strategies in the future that could prevent vascular dementia or even the treatment of the dementia itself.

By: Glenn Madrid, MD

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