Diabetes and Its Relationship To Heart Disease: A Brief Overview

This informational fact sheet serves as a brief overview of diabetes, obesity, and heart disease in the African American community and our community at large.

What Is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease that occurs when your blood glucose (also known as blood sugar) is too high. Our blood glucose is the primary source of energy for our bodies and is derived from the foods we eat. Insulin, a hormone made by a gland known as the pancreas, helps glucose from the food we eat get into our cells to be used for energy. In the case of diabetes, our body either 1) does not make enough insulin 2) does not make insulin at all or 3) does not use insulin well. As a result, the glucose stays in your blood and does not reach your cells. Over time, having too much glucose in your blood can cause health problems — such as heart disease.

Types of Diabetes

The most common types of diabetes are type 2, gestational, and type 1.

   Type 2 – In type 2 diabetes, either your body does not make enough insulin or it does not use properly the insulin that your body does make. It can be developed as a child or in adulthood but most commonly in middle-aged and older adults. It is the most common type of diabetes. Treatment may include lifestyle changes, oral medication or injectable medications (insulin or non-insulin).

   Gestational - This form of diabetes may develop during pregnancy. It usually resolves itself after pregnancy. However, if you have had gestational diabetes, there is a greater chance of developing type 2 diabetes later in life.

   Type 1 - In type 1 diabetes, your body does not make insulin. The immune system attacks and destroys the cells in the pancreas that make insulin. It is usually diagnosed in children and young adults. People with type 1 diabetes need to take insulin every day to stay alive.

Type 2 Diabetes in African Americans

*Type 2 diabetes is an epidemic in African American communities

*4.9 million African-American adults, or 18.7% of all African Americans greater than 20 years of age, have diagnosed or undiagnosed diabetes, compared to 7.1% of non-Hispanic white Americans

*The risk of diabetes is 77% higher among African Americans than among non-Hispanic white Americans. This is felt to be in large part due to sedentary lifestyle, poor dietary habits and obesity.
Obesity in African American Women

*Obesity has risen to epidemic proportions in the African American community

*Obesity is a significant risk factor for development of Type 2 diabetes and other health ailments

*Approximately 60 percent of black women are obese, compared with 32 percent of white women and 41 percent of Hispanic women

*Obesity is decreasing black women's life expectancy and increasing their chances of developing a host of ailments, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease and arthritis

Gestational Diabetes in African American Women

*African American women are disproportionately afflicted with gestational diabetes and face a 52 percent increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes in the future compared to non-Hispanic Caucasian women

How are diabetes and heart disease related?

Over time, high blood sugar levels can cause damage to your blood vessels as well as damage the nerves that control your heart and blood vessels. In addition, high blood sugar levels can cause blood vessels to become stiff and hard. The longer that you have diabetes, the greater the chance that you will develop heart disease.

Diabetes and Heart Disease statistics

*68% of persons over 65 years old with diabetes die from some form of heart disease
*Adults with diabetes are 2-4 times more likely to die from heart disease than without diabetes
*Women with diabetes have a 40% greater risk of developing heart disease than men
*Diabetes is the 7th leading killer of Americans
*Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women

The Good News – You can protect your heart and control (prevent) diabetes!

*Be Active – 30-45 minutes of aerobic exercise most days of the week
*Stop Smoking – smoking increases risk for multiple health conditions including heart disease
*Lose weight – losing even a small percentage of your weight can reduce heart disease risk
*Manage cholesterol – Your bad (LDL) cholesterol should be less than 100
*Manage blood pressure* – Ideal blood pressure is 120/80 or less.

*Eat healthy* – reduce foods high in saturated fat, trans fat, salt, and cholesterol such as fried foods, red meats, and eggs. Instead focus more on high fiber foods such as whole grains, vegetables, and fruits

*Control your diabetes* – Diabetes can be controlled thus significantly reducing your chances of heart disease. *Follow the diabetes management plan that you and your doctor have agreed upon including lifestyle changes and medication compliance*

The purpose of this overview is for informational and educational purposes only. It is strongly advised that you consult with your health care provider in regard to the health treatment plan that is best for you.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/diabetic-heart-disease


https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/facts.htm

https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diabetes/overview/preventing-problems/heart-disease-stroke


https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/black-health.htm

https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=18

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