

CDC makes dire diabetes prediction for US children

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By Keith Mulvihill

NEW ORLEANS (Reuters Health) - One in three American children born in the year 2000 will go on to develop diabetes, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported here Saturday.

The majority of these cases will be adult onset, or type 2 diabetes, which is strongly associated with obesity and a lack of exercise.

The disease results from the body's inability to correctly use insulin, which leads to excessively high blood sugar levels that can increase the risk of blindness, kidney disease and amputations.

"Over the last ten years the proportion of people with diabetes has gone up almost 40 percent between 1990 and 1999," said Dr. K.M. Venkat Narayan chief of the CDC's diabetes epidemiology section, who spoke at the American Diabetes Association's annual meeting here.

The most likely reason for the increase is an increasingly sedentary and overweight population in the U.S.

"Americans are becoming more overweight and get much less physical exercise," Narayan told attendees of the meeting.

And if trends continue, a girl born in 2000 has a 39 percent chance of developing diabetes in her lifetime and a boy born the same year has a 33 percent chance of developing the disease in his lifetime, according to Narayan.

The rates for Hispanics are even higher, according to Narayan, who noted that "a Hispanic male has 45 percent chance and female has 53 percent chance of developing diabetes in their lifetime."

Narayan based his prediction on data collected from the National Health Interview Survey. More than 300,000 Americans were interviewed as part of the survey between 1984 and 2000, he said.

"Diabetes is a very serious disease and our estimates also suggest that there is a lot of life years lost because of diabetes," added Narayan.

A man diagnosed with diabetes at age 40 will lose approximately 12 years of life and a female about 15 years of life, he explained.

## TIME TO SHIFT FOCUS

Over the past few years, Narayan noted that diabetes has received a very high degree of attention in the national media, which has helped raise national awareness of the skyrocketing epidemic.

"But, what we now need to do is change that message and make it more action oriented," he said.

Recent studies have shown that even relatively small amounts of physical activity can cut the risk of diabetes substantially, he noted.

"Walking, for instance, is a very effective way of reducing one's risk," he said. "Just doing thirty minutes of walking or physical activity five times a week, can reduce your risk for developing diabetes by as much as 58 percent."

Those findings are based on the Diabetes Prevention Program, a clinical trial that found that people who made moderate changes - increasing exercise and losing some weight - were more likely to keep diabetes at bay.

"These lifestyle changes worked for people of every racial and ethnic group who participated in the study and they were particularly successful in older Americans, who happen to have the highest risk for developing type 2 diabetes," said Dr. Judith E. Fradkin, of the National Institutes of Health, who spoke at a press conference with Narayan.

Best of all Fradkin points out that you don't have to achieve your ideal body weight in order to reap benefits.

"People in the diabetes prevention program did not get down to their ideal body weight, they simply lost, on average, seven percent of their body weight -- for a person who weighs 200 pounds that would be a 15 pound weight loss and it is that level of weight loss that reduced diabetes by 58 percent," she said.

More than 17 million Americans currently have diabetes, according to the researchers.

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