

Your Weight and Diabetes

NAASO, The Obesity Society

What is diabetes?

Over seventeen million Americans (6.2% of the population) have diabetes. Almost 6 million Americans are unaware they have the disease. There are two main types of diabetes. Both types are caused by problems in how a hormone called insulin (that helps regulate blood sugar) works. Type 1 diabetes most often appears in childhood or adolescence and causes high blood sugar when your body can't make enough insulin. Over 90% of all diabetes cases are what we call type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes is usually diagnosed after age forty; however it is now being found in all ages including children and adolescents. Type 2 diabetes is linked to obesity and physical inactivity. In this form of diabetes your body makes insulin but can't use its insulin properly. At first, your body overproduces insulin to keep blood sugar normal, but over time this causes your body to lose its ability to produce enough insulin to keep blood sugar levels in the normal healthy range. The result is sugar rises in your blood to high levels. Over a long period of time, high blood sugar levels and diabetes can cause heart disease, stroke, blindness, kidney failure, leg and foot amputations, and pregnancy complications. Diabetes can be a deadly disease: over 200,000 people die each year of diabetes related complications.

How does my weight relate to type 2 diabetes?

Carrying extra body weight and body fat go hand and hand with the development of type 2 diabetes. People who are overweight are at much greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes than normal weight individuals. Being overweight puts added pressure on the body's ability to properly control blood sugar using insulin and therefore makes it much more likely for you to develop diabetes. Almost 90% of people with type 2 diabetes are overweight. The number of diabetes cases among American adults jumped by a third during the 1990s, and more increases are expected. This rapid increase in diabetes is due to the growing prevalence of obesity and extra weight in the United States population.

What can you do to prevent diabetes?

The good news is type 2 diabetes is largely preventable. Research studies have found that lifestyle changes and small amounts of weight loss in the range of 5-10% can prevent or delay the development of type 2 diabetes among high-risk adults. Lifestyle interventions including diet and moderate-intensity physical activity (such as walking for 150 minutes per week) were used in these research studies to produce small amounts of weight loss. The development of diabetes was reduced 40% to 60% during these studies that lasted 3 to 6 years. Preventing weight gain, increasing activity levels and working toward small amounts of weight loss if you are overweight can have a big impact on the likelihood that you will develop diabetes in the future. Managing your weight is the best thing you can do to prevent the development of diabetes.

What can you do if you already have diabetes?

You can have a positive influence on your blood sugar and your overall health by choosing foods wisely, exercising regularly, reducing your stress level, and making modest lifestyle changes. Small amounts of weight loss (losing 10 pounds or more) can also have a big effect on how easily you can keep your blood sugar in the healthy range and can help prevent the complication of diabetes. Small amounts of weight reduction can decrease the amount of medication you need to keep your blood sugar in the healthy range. Overall better nutrition, physical activity, and control of blood glucose levels can delay the progression of diabetes and prevent complications.