

# HEALTH MATTERS

## For Your Health



BY DR. GERALD F. JOSEPH JR.

Nearly 24 million Americans are living with diabetes today. Diabetes develops when insulin—a hormone that helps glucose from digested food nourish cells in the body—is in short supply or is not functioning properly. In diabetics, unused glucose builds up in the blood stream to higher than normal levels.

Diabetes is increasingly widespread. While roughly 10 percent of the population over the age of 20 has the disease, another 57 million people are thought to be pre-diabetic. Most cases are diagnosed in people over the age of 45, but diabetes can occur at any age.

**Type 1 (juvenile-onset) diabetes** usually strikes in children and young adults. It develops when the body's immune system destroys the cells in the pancreas that make insulin.

**Type 2 (adult-onset) diabetes** accounts for 90 to 95 percent of diagnosed cases of diabetes. The body becomes resistant to the effects of insulin, forcing the pancreas to produce more to keep glucose levels normal. When the demand for insulin becomes too great, diabetes develops.

Some pregnant women will develop **gestational diabetes**, in which the hormones of the placenta limit the effectiveness of insulin. This form of diabetes occurs in 2 to 5 percent of pregnant women and usually subsides after delivery. However, gestational diabetes increases the risk of type 2 diabetes later in life.

Diabetes can lead to severe damage to the liver, nerves and blood

vessels; blindness; amputation; birth defects or stillbirth; and thyroid problems.

You are at a higher risk for the disease if you are black, Hispanic,

more than nine pounds, or a history of gestational diabetes.

If you have these risk factors or experience increased thirst or urination, constant hunger, blurred vi-

diabetics use insulin shots to regulate blood glucose levels. Type 2 diabetes can be managed through diet and exercise in some cases, but insulin shots or medications

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Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, overweight or physically inactive or have a family or personal history of diabetes, high blood pressure, low HDL ("good") cholesterol levels, high triglyceride levels, previous abnormal glucose screening results, polycystic ovary syndrome, given birth to a baby weighing

more than nine pounds, or a history of gestational diabetes.

Women over age 45 should be tested for diabetes every three years, but earlier or more frequent testing may be needed in women at high risk. If you have diabetes, talk to your doctor about how to keep it well-controlled. Type 1

that lower blood glucose levels may also be necessary.

Healthy lifestyle choices can also lower your risk of diabetes. Try to reach and maintain a healthy weight, eat a diet of healthy and low-fat foods, and get regular exercise.

Dr. Gerald F. Joseph Jr. is president of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

## Progress on Cancer Outreach needed

The American Cancer Society is drawing attention to the progress being made on fighting cancer in minority communities while emphasizing the need for continued efforts in eliminating cancer disparities that still exist.

The society has reported a steady decline in colon cancer incidence and death rates in most racial and ethnic groups. Yet, cancer continues to take a higher toll on minority communities.

African Americans have the highest death rate of any racial and ethnic group in the U.S. for most cancers. And there are barriers in access to quality health care, causing later diagnosis and lower chances of survival.

The organization finds that the causes of disparities are complex and likely reflect social and economic societal gaps, not just biologic differences.

"While it is discouraging that these differences still exist, we must address them in order to save lives and reduce suffering from cancer among African Americans," said Dr. Otis Brawley, American Cancer Society medical officer.

The American Cancer Society has awarded more than \$88 million since 2000 for more than 100 studies that focus on reducing cancer health related disparities.

These studies range across the cancer continuum, from prevention and early detection to end of life.

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