

Eat, walk and test yourself to good health

Diabetes Program focuses on daily exercise, diet and early diagnosis to control and prevent complications from diabetes in Native Americans

Photos and story
by Shannon
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Diabetes is on the rise at Warm Springs Indian Reservation. Well, not really, more like early diagnosis and control of symptoms are on the rise, thanks to programs like The Diabetes Walking Club, which is actively taking large strides to promote walking among Native Americans.

Since June, the club has had monthly walks, with snacks, pedometers, blood sugar tests, water, lunch, diabetes educational materials, free t-shirts, and prizes. Approximately 100 people are registered and more are coming. The last walk had a turnout of 40 participants.

"We want to keep people moving," says Carolyn Harvey, Community Wellness Program and exercise coordinator.

"We recommend one mile per day, that is 2000 steps, but each person is different, so do whatever you can," encourages Kim Yackus, exercise instructor at the Wellness Community Center.

Pedometers, a device used to track distance with steps, are given out for free. Participants who reach 300 miles in any time span, from one month to one year or more, receive a reward.

"By that time" says Yackus, "We hope a habit has formed."

The Diabetes Walking Club also provides free finger-stick blood sugar testing before and after their monthly promotion walks in an effort to show participants the effects of exercise on blood sugar levels. Folks with abnormally high blood sugar are recommended to get an A1C test, a blood test that reveals your blood sugar levels over the last three months, and a possible official diabetes diagnosis. The free tests serve as a means to recognize an early onset of diabetes.

Susan Mathews, diabetes nurse educator at the Indian Health Service (IHS) clinic, explains the purpose of the test "is really only an informal screening to let people know it may be good to get an official diagnosis at the clinic."

Early diagnosis before disaster may be what's adding to the rise in reservation diabetes statistics, now up to 339 active patients, at the IHS clinic. Diagnosed tribal members may be pushing the numbers up but are likely to have a less advanced case of diabetes and less of a chance of complications resulting from diabetes. It is more likely new statistics reflect a growing awareness and responsibility



LEFT: Leroy Bobb strides to the administration building, the first stop for the Diabetes Walk, where healthy snacks, water and educational materials were waiting for participants. BOTTOM RIGHT: Diabetes Walk Club participants line up for a finger-prick blood test before taking off. Another blood test was given at the end of walk in an effort to display the benefits of walking on blood sugar levels. BOTTOM MIDDLE: A Diabetes walk participant snatches a healthy snack provided by the diabetes program. A low carbohydrate diet helps keep blood sugar low and is recommended for diabetics.



erate exercise here. You don't have to train for a marathon to benefit from your exercise."

The growing diabetes epidemic has become increasingly pronounced in the last 50 years. Studies show full-blooded Indians are more likely to be burdened with the disease. It is widely thought that the disease became more rampant as traditional lifestyles changed and were abandoned, creating a society with less physical activity and consequently weight gain.

This theory known as the "thrifty gene theory" hypothesizes that indigenous tribes of North America were made to get through famine. For this reason, their bodies became adept at storing food for times of strife. In today's society famine usually does not exist and there is no reason to store food in the body, resulting in weight gain.

Being overweight is a major precursor for diabetes in all groups of people. When overweight, cells become coated in fat and insulin in your blood stream is not able to enter the cell, causing high blood sugar.

With today's knowledge of the benefits of exercise and diet as prevention and control, diabetes is becoming a less frightening disease.

Thomas explained the change she has seen in the last eight years.

"The view on diabetes has changed. It is no longer a fatalistic thing like it used to be. It is now becoming common knowledge that if you control it, you can avoid the problems associated with it."

"Diabetics", she insisted, "can have full productive lives. It is a chronic disease but it is not terminal."

Thomas's nutritional advice for tribal members is to keep getting those omega-3 oils by eating traditional foods such as fish and eel.

Lack of traditional foods is thought to contribute to the diabetes plight of Native Americans. Getting food used to mean getting exercise, preventing obesity.

Wild game is/was very lean and has a healthier kind of fat than modern beef and pork. Food preparation was low fat and not fried but instead boiled, dried, smoked, or baked. Foods were less processed and higher in fiber. Native Americans rarely had access to fats, sweets, and salt.

For more information on diabetes and related programs, call Carolyn Harvey at 553-4166

among tribal members.

Diabetes Type 2, also known as adult diabetes, is found in alarming percentages in Native Americans throughout the country. It is becoming more common in children. An IHS study revealed that in the years 1991 to 1997 the prevalence of diabetes among American Indians increased among adolescents by 32 percent; among adults age 20-24 by 36 percent; and among adults age 25-34 by 28 percent.

People with diabetes cannot use food for energy very well. In a healthy person, food eaten is digested and changed into a type of sugar called glucose. When diabetic, the glucose stays in the bloodstream.

If these levels stay high for a long period of time, health complications will occur. Diabetes is the number

one cause of blindness, amputations, and kidney failure in the United States.

It is generally thought people inherit the tendency to get diabetes from their parents which is triggered by lack of exercise, extra weight and stress. Symptoms such as excessive thirst, excessive urination, blurred vision, tiredness, and sores that don't heal are signs of a diabetes onset and probably means it's time to go to the doctor.

Timely diabetes pinpointing has become priority throughout the nation. More and more Native American diabetics are preventing progressed diabetic conditions through diet and exercise. Tribal members are avoiding heart attacks, amputations, kidney failure, eye problems, periodontal disease and strokes by addressing the

ailment before it reaches a detrimental stage.

"It used to be," said Sara Thomas, nutritionist for Indian Health Services, "that we didn't know if someone had diabetes until they had complications from it, like a heart attack. And then it was too late, the damage was done."

It's now proven exercise helps lower blood sugar.

Recent studies have confirmed that any amount of physical activity will not only help control blood sugar for diagnosed diabetics but also help prevent onset of diabetes. People who are overweight will still reduce their chances of diabetes with minimal physical activity, even 10 minutes a day helps.

Said Harvey, "We're talking mod-

Rock Art: Current preservation a stroke of luck

(Continued from page 1) neuropsychological symbols everyone sees in altered states.

In contrast, she thinks, "They could come from visions. A zig-zag could be water, a snake, or lightning. Maybe they were spirits. Maybe a woman saw a mountain place to harvest in her rite of passage for berry picking," referring to the triangular zig-zag at the site on Miller Island, which she said immediately made her think of the Three Sisters mountain range.

She hypothesizes about the Columbia-plateau's rock art origin, "I think they were either seeking something for themselves or seeking something for someone else."

Whipple is pleased, that today's archaeologists are eager to listen to elders like her grandma.

"They seemed really receptive to our theories", she said, "We both made great accomplishments. We (the tribes) now have a better understanding of rock art globally and we also know there is a respectful intention to know more from the other side."

Mystery shrouds the petroglyphs and pictographs found throughout the Columbia River Plateau.

Much of the rich oral mythology associated with the petroglyphs and pictographs was lost in European epidemics that swept through the area. In the Dalles area approximately 90 percent of the population was wiped

out due to disease by 1840.

More than 160 sites have been identified in the lower Columbia area, an area defined as the watershed between Priest Rapids and The Dalles, excluding the Snake River.

About 90 of the sites can be found between The Dalles and Pasco with other large concentrations found along the middle and lower Deschutes River.

Many were flooded when they dammed the Columbia below Celilo Falls and other areas.

Some pictographs have suffered vandalism by chalk, paint, and scratched initials.

A few sites are fading from natural weathering.

A unique natural preservation oc-

currence, keeps those still with us around. Pictographs, defined as rock paintings, are most often red, but white, black, yellow, and even blue-green pigments were also used. The red pigment was made from various different minerals.

Crushed iron oxides (hematite and limonite) produced the commonly seen red and yellow colors. Clays bore white and copper oxides, green.

Both charcoal and manganese oxide produced black. These mineral pigments were crushed with binding agents, like blood, egg, fat, plant juice, or urine, to produce paint.

The paintings are estimated to be between 200 and 12,000 years old. Their current presentation state is a

stroke of luck.

Mineral deposits that seep over cliffs, after a rain, act as a fixative for paintings.

When the rainwater evaporates, it leaves a thin film of mineral that is transparent in ideal situations. Heavy mineral build up will cloud images.

Between the pictographs unique preservation, Viola Kalama's memories of childhood stories, and dedicated scholars, the story once told, may someday be told again.

Some factual information for this article was taken from the book "Indian Rock Art of the Columbia Plateau" by James D. Keyser