

Diabetes control key to cardiovascular disease risk reduction, experts say

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Diabetes and cardiovascular disease are a one-two punch that is knocking the health out of an increasing number of Americans.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that nearly 26 million Americans, 8.3 percent of the population, have diabetes and 7 million of those cases are undiagnosed. In 2008, the CDC estimated 23.6 million Americans were diabetic and another 57 million were prediabetic. The latter condition indicates higher blood sugar levels that increase the risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke. The increase in new cases of diabetes and prediabetes concerns local health experts.

“That’s huge,” said Marci Sloane, registered dietitian and certified diabetes educator at Good Samaritan Medical Center. “The issue is prediabetes puts you at the same risk.”

Sloane said people with diabetes need to take the condition seriously by continually monitoring and controlling their blood-sugar levels. “It’s a hard disease to control. It’s a lot to think about,” she acknowledged.

In addition to increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes can cause other complications, including kidney disease, Sloane said. Almost 70 percent of individuals with diabetes have hypertension, another risk factor for cardiovascular disease, according to the CDC.

A local heart doctor also said Americans need to take more responsibility for their health.

“Through awareness and the ability to diagnose earlier, we are making a difference in terms of complications related to cardiovascular disease. But the reality of it is that despite all our efforts people are not taking ownership for their health,” said Dr. Darryl Miller, a cardiologist at Cleveland Clinic Health and Wellness Center in West Palm Beach.

“The most cost-effective ways to tackle cardiovascular disease is by focusing on four basic things — diet, exercise, weight control” and not smoking, Miller said.

The methods that lower risk for cardiovascular disease also help prevent or control diabetes.

Miller suggests patients eat foods low in saturated fat and high in monounsaturated fats and fiber, while controlling portion size. He suggests avoiding eggs, which are high in cholesterol and recommends consuming fresh fruits and vegetables. A moderate intake of alcohol — not more than two drinks a day for men and not more than one a day for women — is healthier than overconsumption, he said. All those elements are part of the typical Mediterranean diet, Miller said.

“That region is made up of more than 16 countries and you can choose from a diet that suits your palate as opposed to some of these diets that are extreme,” the cardiologist said. He said the Mediterranean lifestyle also includes regular physical activity. When diet and exercise do not control cholesterol, individuals may benefit from taking a statin, a class of drug that is well-tolerated, Miller said.

He urges people to take responsibility for their health as most cardiovascular disease risk factors — smoking, inactivity, cholesterol, hypertension, diabetes, obesity and depression — can be modified.

“They account for more than 90 percent of the attributable risk for heart attack,” Miller said. “If you focus on them, you will be able to alter your risk.”

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