

Who Has Diabetes?

By Jean Oxendine

Closing the Gap, Diabetes • February/March 1999

Of the 16 million Americans suffering from diabetes, about 5.4 million of these people do not know they have the disease. Each year, an additional 798,000 people are diagnosed with diabetes, and the number of people with diagnosed diabetes has risen from 1.5 million in 1958 to 10.6 million in 1998—a sixfold increase.

The majority of people who suffer from diabetes have type 2 diabetes, which accounts for 90 to 95 percent of all diagnosed cases of the disease. Diabetes affects men and women at equal rates, with 7.5 million men (8.2 percent of all men), and 8.1 million women (8.2 percent of all women) having the disease. Diabetes strikes all age groups—it is most prevalent in older Americans, with 6.3 million age 65 and older having diabetes (18.4 percent of this age group), and 15.6 million Americans age 20 and older having diabetes (8.2 percent of this age group).

Minorities have particular reason to become aware and involved in NDEP and other diabetes education and treatment programs. Among African Americans, 2.3 million people age 20 and older (10.8 percent) have diabetes. African Americans are 1.7 times as likely to have diabetes as Caucasians of similar age. Hispanic Americans are almost twice as likely to have diabetes as non-Hispanic whites of similar age. Both Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans have higher rates of diabetes than non-Hispanic whites.

American Indians have the highest rates of diabetes in the world, ranging from 5 to 50 percent. Among the Pima Indians of Arizona, half of all the adults have type 2 diabetes. The data for diabetes among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are limited, but we do know that some groups within this population are at increased risk for diabetes. Data collected from 1988 to 1995 show Native Hawaiians are twice as likely to have diagnosed diabetes as Caucasian residents of Hawaii.

In 1995, diabetes contributed to 187,800 deaths, and was the seventh leading cause of death listed on U.S. death certificates (sixth leading cause of death by disease). Diabetes death rates vary considerably across racial and ethnic groups. Compared to non-Hispanic

whites, diabetes death rates were 2.5 times higher among African Americans, 2.4 times higher among American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/AN), and 1.7 times higher among persons of Hispanic origin.

The complications from diabetes are numerous, affecting minorities at greater rates than non-minorities. According to NIDDK, African Americans experience higher rates of diabetes complications such as eye disease, kidney failure, and amputations, as compared to whites. The frequency of diabetic retinopathy is 40 percent to 50 percent higher in African Americans than in whites, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. African Americans with diabetes experience end-stage renal disease about four times more often than whites with diabetes. And they are more likely to undergo lower-extremity amputations than whites with diabetes.

According to the American Diabetes Association, in 1995, the rate of diabetic end stage renal disease among AI/ANs was six times higher than the general population with diabetes. More than half of lower limb amputations in the U.S. occurred among people with diabetes, and amputation rates among AI/ANs were significantly higher than the general population.

Although studies don't universally agree, there is some evidence that suggests Mexican Americans have a higher incidence of microalbuminuria—an early indicator of diabetic nephropathy—than non-Hispanic whites. Other research shows Mexican Americans have higher rates of diabetic retinopathy than white Americans.

Diabetes costs the United States about \$98.2 billion annually, for total health care and related costs for treatment. Of this total, direct medical costs (e.g. hospitalization, medical care, treatment supplies) account for about \$44.1 billion. The other \$54.1 billion covers indirect costs such as disability payments, time lost from work, and premature death.

As evidenced by these statistics, diabetes is a disease that affects everyone, regardless of age, race, or gender. The good news is that the NDEP campaign is making efforts to turn these numbers around.

For more information on NDEP, please call 1-800-438-5383; or visit the Web sites at <http://ndep.nih.gov/> or <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes> ❖

