

Diabetes Prevention Starts In Childhood

by Gary Scheiner MS, CDE

Type-2 Diabetes is one of the fastest-growing and most devastating diseases in this country. What used to be considered an “older person’s disease” is now striking children at an alarming rate. In Type-2 diabetes, insulin produced by the pancreas is not utilized properly by the body’s cells, and blood sugar levels start to rise. Symptoms of Type-2 Diabetes include excessive thirst/urination/hunger, slow-healing wounds, frequent infections, blurred vision, and a lack of energy. Risk factors include a family history of diabetes, excess body weight, and PCOS (polycystic ovarian syndrome). African-Americans and Hispanics-Americans are also at increased risk, as are children who had a low birth weight and whose moms had gestational diabetes.

It is estimated that one in three children born after 2000 will develop Type-2 Diabetes during his or her lifetime. Today, in many urban areas, children account for nearly half of newly diagnosed cases of Type-2 diabetes. To make matters worse, Type-2 diabetes is often accompanied by elevations in blood pressure, cholesterol and triglycerides – a condition called Metabolic Syndrome. These conditions

greatly increase the risk of developing heart disease at a young age.

Why the sudden upswing in young people developing Type-2 Diabetes? Weight gain. Approximately 30% of U.S. adolescents are overweight, and 15% are obese. Overall, the prevalence of overweight children has doubled in the past 20 years. Excess body fat interferes with the way insulin works, resulting in “pre-diabetes” and, ultimately, Type-2 diabetes.

To help fight the overweight and Type-2 Diabetes epidemic, experts recommend the following:

- Serve fresh fruits and vegetables at every meal.
- Serve food on individual plates rather than “family style” to help control portions.
- No snacks after 8pm.
- Find an organized sport or active job or hobby to help burn calories.
- Limit television to no more than one hour per day.
- Give your child a pedometer and provide non-food rewards for taking

more than 10,000 steps a day.

- Meet with a dietitian to learn about proper portion sizes and making wise food substitutions.
- Exercise yourself, and cut down on your TV time. Children tend to model their parents.
- Eliminate sugar-sweetened beverages from your home. Serve water or diet drinks instead.
- Keep track of your child’s BMI (body mass index) – see the article from the American Academy of Pediatrics in this guide.

Regardless of your child’s physical condition and risk factors, ask your pediatrician to screen for pre-diabetes annually. Type-2 Diabetes is not a death sentence, but it can lead to serious health problems if it goes untreated.

Note: Gary Scheiner is Owner and Director of Integrated Diabetes Services, a private practice located in Wynnewood, PA, specializing in diabetes management and lifestyle modification for children and adults nationwide. For more information, visit www.integrateddiabetes.com or call (610) 642-6055.