

Diabetes: A consistent health concern in the African American community

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Diabetes has been a consistent and constant health concern for many African American families for numerous years. Diabetes can have severe effects physiologically and physically on the body. If diagnosed and treated properly diabetes is a health concern that can be managed. On the other hand, if the disease is not handled in a timely manner, death may result.

According to Dr. Endear Curry of HealthPartners Clinics in Minnesota, "Diabetes is a big health concern in our [African American] community, right along with heart disease, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)." She also added how alarmingly high the numbers are in comparison to other races and ethnicities".

According to the American Diabetes Association, diabetes is a disease in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin, a hormone that is needed to convert sugar, starches and other foods to energy. The cause of diabetes is not known, but factors such as the environment and genetics appear to play a significant role. Diabetes is a disease that can occur in both children and adults.

In order for diabetes to be diagnosed, a test called the Fasting Plasma Glucose Test (FPG) or an Oral Glucose Tolerance Test (OGTT) will be performed by your health care provider. The FPG is faster, easier and less expensive and thus the American Diabetes Association recommends it.

There are two types of diabetes, Type 1 and Type 2. Type 1 diabetes is a condition that happens when the body fails to produce insulin. The ADA estimates that 5%-10% of Americans who are diagnosed with diabetes have this form. The second, Type 2 diabetes results from insulin resistance, a condition that causes the body to use insulin improperly.

Complications from Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes include heart disease, blindness, as well as kidney and nerve damage.

There are various types of treatments to manage diabetes. These include the use of diabetes monitoring devices, exercise and diet. Curry suggests, "The most important things to do to monitor and prevent diabetes is diet and exercise".

If you or someone you know is dealing with diabetes or may be at risk, please contact your health care provider immediately.

Brandi Phillips is a life skills therapist, personal trainer and professional dancer. She is motivated to cultivate healthy children and sustain healthy adults.