

Living with Diabetes



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Westside
Health
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is a disease that can often be prevented and or with proper care, can be controlled. There are steps we can all take now that can make a difference.

Earlier this year Oprah's show ran the topic "Diabetes—America's Silent Killer," about the ways in which type 2 diabetes can insinuate itself into the culture of an ethnic or racial group. It's true we learn how to eat as children. If our parents eat unhealthily, and later develop type 2 diabetes because of it, chances are we will also become diabetic if we continue to eat our childhood favorites. One of Oprah's guests mentioned that many people who have parents with type 2 diabetes feel resigned to the idea that they will inevitably develop it, too. They won't even try to take the steps of exercising or eating healthily that would prevent this from happening.

In celebration of National Diabetes Month, we have selected this growing problem as our November topic. A recent study published in the Journal of Women's Health reported a rapid rise in the number of hospitalizations due to diabetes for young adults, particularly young women. This information along with the accelerating problem of obesity in this country reinforces the seriousness of this current trend. Diabetes is not merely a condition; it is a disease with deadly consequences. This

The culture of type 2 diabetes isn't just created by one's immediate family, though; ethnic and racial identity can also play a part. At one point in the show, Oprah focused on a church congregation from Ohio, all of whom were prediabetic or diabetic. They were also all African-American. After the camera panned in on french fries and pork chops sizzling in vats of oil, Dr. Ian Smith, a guest on the show, commented that eating such foods was both a direct cause of type 2 diabetes and an integral part of African-American culture. He noted some of the congregation's reluctance to give up fried foods even when presented with facts about their potential harmfulness, he explained: "Habits are tough to break, especially for African-Americans when their habits are around food, which is like a culture for them."

Of course, we African-Americans are not the only group to consider unhealthy foods a staple of our culture. When I think of Italian food, I immediately picture pizza and pasta. Main

courses in Chinese-American cuisine can be flavored with sauces containing as much sugar as desserts. American style Mexican favorites include refried beans, burritos, and tacos not to mention toppings like cheese and sour cream. Naturally, most cultural groups have their healthy dishes as well. But the popularity of the unhealthier foods the way they have pervaded mainstream American culture shows that there is something about every cultural group's fattiest, most carb-laden foods that makes them the hardest to resist.

What does it take to break out of eating patterns that have been ingrained in us by our parents or culture? Dr. Smith, who is African-American, said he was brought up eating similar foods to those consumed by the congregation in Ohio. Since then, however, he has changed his lifestyle and is now the dietary and medical expert for the 50 Million Pound Challenge. Take away lesson: This is an example of how willpower can overcome habit. Although it's tempting to legitimize our food cravings

by looking back to our childhood or even cultural traditions, it won't really help us the long run. That is, not unless we also consider the circumstances in which these foods were originally consumed: as every-day staples, but treats to compensate for it when food was scarce.

As we head into the upcoming New Year, many will compile list of New Year's Resolutions. We all know that most forget about that list by February and push their goals to next year. However, if you family member currently has diabetes and/or suffer from obesity, I have provided you some changes to know regarding the new health care law

Health Care Reform Impact on the Diabetes and Obesity Epidemic:

A number of provisions of new health care reform legislation could help address diabetes and obesity problem. Some of these have already been enacted and others are scheduled to begin soon in the next 3 years

Insurance companies can no longer deny coverage or exclude benefits to children to preexisting conditions of diabetes (this will be expanded to include all ages in 2014)

New health plans and Medicare must cover diabetes screening

Medicare covers nutritional therapy to seniors with diabetes

Most chain restaurants must post nutritional information on menus (2011).

Locally, Westside Health Authority runs the "Body & Soul" program at Austin Town Square Park. This program is designed to educate, prevent, self-manage chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. For more information contact Tigee Hill (773) 786-0249.

- Resources:**
- American Diabetes Association
 - Health Reform Source: Implementation Timeline
 - NIDDK National Diabetes Statistics
 - USDHHS National Diabetes Education Program

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