

Millions on verge of diabetes don't know it, CDC reports

March 21 2013, by Steven Reinberg, Healthday Reporter



Only 11 percent of the 79 million Americans with prediabetes aware they have the condition.

(HealthDay)—Only 11 percent of the estimated 79 million Americans who are at risk for diabetes know they are at risk, federal health officials reported Thursday.

The condition, known as prediabetes, describes higher-than-[normal blood sugar](#) levels that put people in danger of developing diabetes, according to the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

"We have a huge issue with the small number of people who know they have it. It's up a bit from when we measured it last, but it's still abysmally low," said report author Ann Albright, director of the CDC's Division of Diabetes Translation.

"We need people to understand their risk and take action if they are at risk for diabetes," Albright said. "We know how to prevent [type 2 diabetes](#), or at least delay it, so there are things people can do, but the first step is knowing what your risk is—to know if you have prediabetes."

Things that put people at risk for prediabetes include being overweight or obese, being physically inactive and not eating a healthy diet, Albright said. These people should see their doctor and have their [blood sugar levels](#) checked, she said.

There is also a [genetic component](#), Albright said, which is why having a family history of diabetes is another risk factor. "Your genetics loads the gun, then your lifestyle pulls the trigger," she said.

According to the report, published in the March 22 issue of the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, the lack of awareness of prediabetes was the same across the board, regardless of income, education, health insurance or access to health care.

One expert found the numbers troubling.

"People don't know about prediabetes, they don't exercise, they don't eat appropriate foods and we are going to have many more diabetics in the near future than we have now," said Dr. Spyros Mezitis, an endocrinologist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

The danger of prediabetes is that it can progress to full-blown diabetes, with all the complications that condition entails, including heart, kidney, circulation and vision problems.

Albright noted that 30 percent or more of those with prediabetes will develop diabetes over the course of a decade.

The number of Americans with diabetes is already staggering. According to the American Diabetes Association, 25.8 million children and adults in the United States—8.3 percent of the population—have diabetes.

"The good news is we know there are things you can do to prevent or delay the development of type 2 diabetes," Albright said. "You can prevent or delay diabetes if you lose 5 percent to 7 percent of your body weight and get 150 minutes of physical activity a week."

Another expert said it starts with what you eat.

Eating a healthy diet that limits sugars and carbohydrates is important, said Dr. Joel Zonszein, director of the Clinical Diabetes Center at Montefiore Medical Center in New York City.

Exercise and diet can reduce the risk of diabetes by about 58 percent, he said, and "giving the drug metformin can reduce the risk by 31 percent. Lifestyle changes, together with metformin, which the American [Diabetes](#) Association recommends for [prediabetes](#), will be very effective."

More information: For more on diabetes, visit the [American Diabetes Association](#).

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