

Diabetes month - 10 Nov 2008

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November is Diabetes Month - dedicated to raising awareness of this debilitating disease that affects millions of people around the world. Type 1 diabetes - which generally starts in childhood and requires daily insulin injections for life, while a relatively common and serious disease, has been outstripped by type 2 diabetes.

I have seen type 2 diabetes described as a 'mild form of diabetes' in nursing and school texts. This is far from the case. Type 2 diabetes is serious, very serious. The incidence of type 2 diabetes is rising rapidly everywhere in the world, apparently related to lifestyles that are poor in exercise and self-restraint and high in calories. An accumulation of abdominal fat seems to be a particular risk factor for developing the disease - which can, in many cases, be prevented entirely by exercise and calorie restriction.

Diabetes affects the whole body. People with the disease suffer damage to their blood vessels that causes eye disease, heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and peripheral vascular disease leading to loss of limbs through gangrene. Tight control of blood glucose through exercise, diet and medication is required for life in a diabetic - and even this does not completely prevent the complications of the disease.

Type 1 diabetes is largely regarded as an autoimmune disease - something that it is difficult to prevent. Type 2 diabetes, on the other hand, can be prevented. At least as much effort needs to be put in to prevention as into developing more and more drugs for the condition - some of which may cause more harm than good.

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