



DIABETES AND BLACK WOMEN: AM I AT RISK?

For Black women, the risk of developing diabetes is great. It affects 1 in 4 women ages 55 years and older, and is listed as the fourth leading cause of death for all ages. Diabetes is also more prevalent among Black women than other ethnic groups—as are some of the factors that increase the risk of developing it, including high blood pressure, overweight and obesity and high blood cholesterol.

But there's good news, too. According to a study conducted by the Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP), losing 5 to 7 percent of body weight can reduce one's risk for developing diabetes. So, you can take action and lower your chance of developing diabetes and its risk factors. This fact sheet offers several steps you can take to reduce your diabetes risks.

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes, often referred to as “sugar,” is a serious, common and costly disease. It is a disease in which the body does not make enough insulin, or cannot use the insulin it makes effectively. Insulin is needed to help the glucose, or sugar, that is produced when a person digests food enter the cells of the body. Diabetes is a lifelong condition and will steadily worsen unless a person makes consistent and healthy lifestyle changes.

Risk Factors for Diabetes

Lifestyle affects many of the “risk factors” of diabetes. Risk factors are conditions or habits that increase the chances of developing a disease or having it worsen. For diabetes, there are two types—those you cannot change and those you can control. The ones you cannot change are family history and age, which for women becomes a risk factor at or near the age of 55.

Most risk factors can be controlled. Often, all it takes are lifestyle changes. Here is a quick review of these risk factors:

- **Overweight/Obesity.** Nearly 80 percent of Black women are overweight and 51 percent are obese, increasing the risk not only of diabetes but a host of other conditions, including heart disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, arthritis and some cancers. Losing weight will help lower risk.

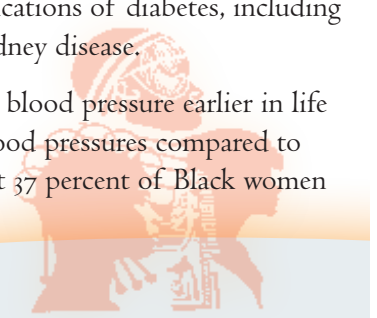
Lasting weight loss is a result of change in lifestyle—adopt a healthy nutrition plan and get regular physical activity. The National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) has a tip sheet titled “More Than 50 Ways to Prevent Diabetes” that contains nutrition tips and physical activity examples. (For a copy of the tip sheet, contact NDEP. It's listed in the “To Learn More” section of this document.)

- **Physical Activity.** Fifty-five percent of Black women are physically inactive—they don't participate in any spare time or recreational physical activity.

Physical activity is crucial for good health. Try to do at least 30 minutes of a moderate-intensity activity such as brisk walking or another activity that you enjoy such as dancing at least five days a week. If you need to, divide the period into shorter timeframes of at least 10 minutes each.

- **High Blood Pressure.** Also called hypertension, is an important risk factor for the development and worsening of many complications of diabetes, including diabetic eye disease and kidney disease.

Black women develop high blood pressure earlier in life and have higher average blood pressures compared to other ethnic groups. About 37 percent of Black women



ACTION PLAN: FIVE STEPS TO REDUCING YOUR RISK FOR DIABETES

- Take a diabetes risk assessment test at www.BlackWomensHealth.ORG/Diabetes and refer to the questions below to ask your doctor.
- Know your cholesterol numbers — LDL, HDL and triglyceride levels
- Quit smoking
- Create a healthy eating meal plan
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Join the Imperative’s Walking for Wellness Program

have high blood pressure. Hypertension also increases the risk of stroke and congestive heart failure—and Black women have high rates of both.

Lower elevated blood pressure by following a healthy eating plan, including limiting salt intake and other forms of sodium, getting regular physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, and, if alcoholic beverages are consumed, do so in moderation (not more than one drink a day). If you have high blood pressure, you also may need to take medication.

- **High Blood Cholesterol.** Nearly half of Black women have a total cholesterol that is too high. Excess cholesterol and fat in the blood builds up in the walls of vessels that supply blood to the heart and can lead to blockages. A “lipoprotein profile” tests the levels of key types of cholesterol—total, LDL (“bad”), and HDL (“good”) cholesterol—and triglycerides, a fatty substance in the blood.
- **Smoking.** About one in five Black women smoke. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that smoking is an independent risk factor for diabetes and that among people with diabetes, smoking aggravates the risk of serious disease and premature death. People with diabetes have an increased risk of heart disease, which is further elevated if they smoke.

Take Action to Reduce Risk of Diabetes

Now that you know how to reduce your risk for diabetes, what should you do? Begin by finding out your “risk profile.” See the box below for questions to ask your doctor. Then, begin taking some steps towards healthier living. Start today and reduce your risk of developing diabetes.

To Learn More

Black Women’s Health Imperative

1726 M Street, N.W., Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 548-4000 – National Office • (202) 543-9743 – Facsimile
www.BlackWomensHealth.ORG • CFC #11148

National Diabetes Prevention Education Program

A partnership of the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and more than 200 public and private organizations.
<http://ndep.nih.gov>

American Diabetes Association

National Call Center
Phone: (800) 342-2383
<http://www.diabetes.org>

Office on Women’s Health

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
National Women’s Health Information Center
Phone: (800) 994-WOMAN
<http://www.4woman.gov>

This publication was made possible by cooperative agreement number 05014 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the Black Women’s Health Imperative and do not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

1. Am I at risk for diabetes?
2. What is my blood sugar level? If it is borderline or high, what do I need to do about it?
3. What is my blood pressure? What does it mean for me, and what do I need to do about it?
4. What are my cholesterol numbers? (These include total cholesterol, LDL, HDL and triglycerides, a type of fat found in the blood and food.) What do they mean for me, and what do I need to do about them?
5. What are my “body mass index” (BMI) and waist measurements?
6. Do they mean that I need to lose weight for my health?
7. What other screening tests for diabetes do I need?
8. How much physical activity do I need to help prevent, delay or control diabetes?
9. What is a healthy meal for me?
10. What can I do to quit smoking?