

Disability, Long Term Care & Employee Benefit Advisory

AVOIDING DIABETES . . . and Adding 6 Years to Your Life! Our Diabetes Epidemic

AVOIDING DIABETES prompted me to share a VERY personal story. My mother was an insulin diabetic for most of her life starting back in the 1950's until her passing away over two decades ago. Since she was taking insulin several times daily, I'm sure that diabetes was on her mind every waking hour. Point being, I realized if there was any "good news" about my mother's diabetes, it was that I learned that diabetes should be feared and avoided at all costs.

*My mother's illness prompted me to exercise regularly and eat a healthy, well balanced diet. More importantly, it prompted me to pay attention to my daughter's lifestyles as a "good Dad". As a consequence, my concerns about **your** children's future prompted me to write this article. Here's the facts . . .*

Diabetes today affects tens of millions of people in the United States and costs about \$174 billion each year in medical expenditures - more than any other health condition. Increasing evidence is showing that obesity and type 2 diabetes are inextricably linked, and rising obesity rates are fueling the growing type 2 diabetes epidemic.

"Weight loss, even a modest amount; has been found to help people with diabetes achieve and sustain blood glucose control and live healthier, longer and more active lives." Regrettably the percentage of adults classified as obese doubled from 1980 to 2000 to 31 percent of the population. It's estimated that "among U.S. adults aged 18-79 years, the incidence of diagnosed diabetes increased 41% from 1997 to 2003. "Obesity is a major factor in this recent increase of newly diagnosed diabetes" as reported in Medical News TODAY.

Unfortunately diabetes is also known to compound the risk of other illnesses. "Type 2 diabetes patients receiving intensive treatment to lower their blood glucose levels were actually found to have a 20 percent reduced risk of kidney disease" as reported in the San Diego Union-Tribune

Treating the nation's 10 most expensive medical conditions will cost nearly \$500 billion this year. Many of these conditions, including heart disease, cancer and diabetes, are common chronic diseases that also tend to be preventable. For today, let's focus on diabetes as it has been proven that most cases (90+%) of diabetes are preventable. If you're not already aware, you need to understand what diabetes actually is.

Diabetes is a disease that effects how your body uses the food that you eat each day. Glucose is a simple sugar, which is your body's primary source of energy. The digestive process turns the meal you just ate into glucose, which is then distributed, throughout your body via the bloodstream. Some of this "blood sugar" is used by the brain, which requires a constant supply of glucose and other cells, which also need immediate energy. The rest is stored in the liver and muscles as a starch called glycogen or as fat to be used later as your body's energy needs require it.

A normal body maintains an even balance of sugar in the blood to properly satisfy the body's energy needs. Any disruption creates a chemical imbalance, too low a blood sugar level causes Hypoglycemia and too high a blood sugar level causes Hyperglycemia.

The pancreas is an organ that produces the hormone Insulin, which helps maintain the proper levels of blood sugar and is a vital component to the smooth transition of glucose into the cells. When the pancreas does not produce enough insulin to properly release glycogen from the liver to the bloodstream or the body doesn't correctly use it the result is high blood sugar or diabetes.

According to a New England Journal of Medicine study, nine out of 10 cases of adult diabetes could be prevented if people exercised more, ate healthier food, stopped smoking and adapted other healthy behavior. A Harvard School of Public Health research team led by Dr. Frank Hu, determined the most important risk factor is being overweight. The heavier an individual is, the greater the chances of having blood sugar problems. And type 2 diabetes is

responsible for 90 to 95 percent of blood sugar problems in the U.S., according to the American Diabetes Association.

Medicine.org asks the question "Is Diabetes Preventable?" The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that 40 percent of the U.S. adults ages 40 to 74, or 41 million people, were pre-diabetic in 2000. In 2002, 54 million U.S. adults were pre-diabetic. This represents a 32 percent growth in the number of pre-diabetics over just a two year period. Knowing that many pre-diabetics will go on to develop type 2 diabetes within 10 years makes this an even more frightening statistic. It's been said we have a *diabetes epidemic* on our hands. The word epidemic seems appropriate.

The Defeat Diabetes Foundation has recently reported on the multiple complications diabetics face. At the top of the list, in my opinion, is that Diabetics are 65% more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease. 60 to 70% of all diabetics have mild to severe forms of nervous system damage, including carpal tunnel syndrome and impaired sensation in the feet or hands. Diabetics are 2 to 4 times more likely to develop heart disease and 6 times more likely to suffer a stroke. Plus, an estimated 25% of all kidney and dialysis patients are diabetic.

This year there will be 24,000 new cases of blindness and diabetes is now the leading cause of blindness. Diabetes is now the seventh leading cause of death and the eight most expensive U.S. health condition.

The Boston Globe reported in 2011 that diabetics live six years less than those that are not diabetic. This bears repeating . . . diabetics lose 6 years of life . . . and our life style is causing the diabetes.

If you're a parent just learning about the risks and complications of diabetes, I have a new mantra for you "no more french fries". I happened to see a young child crying recently and her mom was "quieting her down" with a french fry. It reminded me of our responsibility to our children in teaching them about the value of a healthy diet and exercise . . . so my new mantra is "no more french fries".

A recent study determined that our LIFETIME eating habits, what and how much we eat, is learned by the age five. Those of you with very young children, it's critically important to focus on how much your children trust you. They trust you to teach them about life itself and guide them on their journey. Giving them french fries to quiet them down is the first step toward creating an overweight diabetic decades later. Our responsibility to our children will be our lifetime legacy.

Let's bottom line my message today. You and your children have the opportunity to reduce the likelihood of developing Alzheimer's by 65 percent and live six years longer by simply not becoming diabetic that we know is preventable 90 percent of the time!

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Allan Checkoway, RHU most recently authored "*I'm Disabled . . . Now What?*", created for people whose lives have been impacted by changes in their overall health. Fortunately, our decades of experiences in working with people who have become disabled, sometimes ending up in long term care situations has given us a unique perspective that can benefit our readers. We've taken what we believe to be all the best up to date accessABLE resources from a multitude of resources, putting them all together in one place in "*I'm Disabled . . . Now What?*" and on our new website www.DisabilityandSeniorResources.com. **We are dedicated to helping restore active lifestyles.** Allan is presently the Principal of Disability Services Group, an Employee Benefit Advisory firm. Allan's address is 661 Highland Ave. Suite 103, Needham, MA 02494, tel: 781.400.5055; email: allan@disabilityservices.com