



## Many with diabetes don't know they have the disease



Aunt Joan had been complaining about how tired she was. She is 60 years old and has been very active her whole life. Recently she had not been feeling well and had lost some weight even though she always seemed to be hungry. On July 19, my Husband Michael, Aunt Joan and I drove to New Jersey for a family wedding. Less than a half hour into the trip Aunt Joan had to go to the bathroom. She

became very defensive and irritable when asked if she had gone to the bathroom before leaving. We urged her to see her doctor which she did. Sure enough she was diagnosed with diabetes.

According to the American Diabetes Association, approximately 23.6 million people have been diagnosed with diabetes in the United States. Similar to Aunt Joan, about a third of these people (5.7 million) don't even know they have the disease.

The American Diabetes Association lists the following symptoms of possible diabetes: tired, weight loss, hunger, thirst, frequent urination, irritable, and blurred vision. Once diagnosed it is important to understand how to control and manage the disease through exercise, a balanced diet and medication.

What is diabetes? When you eat food, it changes into glucose which is released into the blood stream. Glucose is the main source of fuel in your body. If your car doesn't have any gas, how can you expect it to work? Glucose needs insulin to help it get into the blood. There are two types of diabetes: Type 1 -- Your body has difficulty in making insulin; must take insulin each day to live; Type 2 -- Your has a problem using the insulin you have; most common form of diabetes; related to age, family history of diabetes, obesity, previous history of gestational diabetes, physical inactivity, and ethnicity.

Regardless of whether you have been diagnosed with Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes, there are a number of ways that you can manage your health:

not only do you have the potential to better manage your glucose levels, but also the likelihood that you will lose weight in the process. Diabetes will probably not be the only disease that will be positively impacted through increased exercise. Other diseases that are associated with diabetes include hypertension and cardiovascular disease, which could also be positively affected.

Eating a balanced diet is also another lifestyle change that has potential to improve blood glucose levels. Reducing your intake of glucose-rich foods, (e.g., processed foods high in fructose corn syrup and maintaining a low fat diet may improve glucose control. It has also been found that smaller more frequent meals can give you better control of your appetite and blood glucose levels.

Regardless of whether you have Type 1 or Type 2 Diabetes, you have to be faithful about taking your medications. Both types of diabetes can require taking insulin, but there are also pills that are prescribed to lower glucose levels and increase the effects of insulin. Communication about your medication with your doctor is important for good management of your diabetes. Medication side effects, changes in diet, activity or medication schedule should all be discussed with your doctor.

Knowledge is power. It is very important that you know as much as possible about diabetes. Know your numbers so that you can take control and prevent the negative outcomes that are associated with the disease. Your blood glucose level provides a guideline for how well your diabetes is being managed. One of the "10 Keys" to Healthy Aging is to lower your blood glucose level below 100 mg/dl. After all, managing your diabetes is one more step to living for a "Healthier Tomorrow." To check to see if you are at risk for diabetes, visit the American Diabetes Association Web site for their on-line self test at [www.diabetes.org/risk-test.jsp](http://www.diabetes.org/risk-test.jsp) . See your doctor if you think that you may have diabetes.

*This column was written by Rochele A. Brown, CHA Student; Kathy Williams, CHA Ambassador Education Director/clinic Coordinator; and Constance Bayles, CHA Program Director. CHA is a part of the Department of Epidemiology, in the Graduate School of Public Health, at the University of Pittsburgh. It is one of 33 Prevention Research Centers in the United States*

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Exercise has an insulin-like effect; subsequently you may not need to take as much insulin if you exercise. Individuals should exercise 30 minutes a day for five days a week (United States Surgeon General). Any amount of exercise is better than none. If it has been a while since you have exercised, check with your Doctor. Start slow, and when you feel comfortable, increase either how fast you exercise or how long. By increasing your activity level,

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funded by the Centers for Disease Control. For questions or more information contact David J. Fetterman, Community Outreach Coordinator & Director of Education at the Center for Healthy Aging at 412-383-3121 or visit [www.healthyaging.pitt.edu](http://www.healthyaging.pitt.edu)