

DIABETES

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November is National Diabetes Awareness Month. In the United States, 18.2 million (6.3%) of the population is estimated to have diabetes. However, 5.2 million (29%) of these persons have not been diagnosed. In the Pima Indian population, 68% of the population has diabetes, and in urban Hispanic populations that number is 22%. Given the growing rate of diabetes among both children, and adults, it is important for people to understand what diabetes is and how it can be prevented or controlled.

Diabetes is a disease in which blood sugar levels are above normal. Most of the food we eat is turned into sugar for our bodies to use for energy. The pancreas, an organ that lies near the stomach, makes a hormone called insulin to help glucose get into the cells of our bodies. When you have diabetes, your body either doesn't make enough insulin, or can't use its own insulin as well as it should. This causes sugar to build up in your blood.

Diabetes is diagnosed by testing a person's blood sugar level. Some of the symptoms of diabetes can be frequent urination, excessive thirst, extreme hunger, and feeling tired much of the time. However, many people will not have any symptoms at all, and still be diagnosed with diabetes.

Healthy eating and physical activity are the basic therapies for treating diabetes. Many people also need medication such as pills or insulin (depending on the type of diabetes they have). Even with medication, physical activity and healthful eating are the cornerstones to treating diabetes successfully.

If you are interested in learning more about diabetes, whether you have been diagnosed with diabetes or not, you are invited to attend a monthly education group that meets at the public library. June Merica, one of the nurse practitioners at the APIA clinic who is also a certified diabetes educator, leads the group. The next meeting will take place on Monday, November 22nd at 6:30 p.m. at the public library. For more information on the education group or being tested for diabetes, please contact June Merica at 581-2742 or Jeanne Kemp at 581-1202.

Beginning in February of 2005, the Iliuliuk Clinic will start an initiative which will focus on diabetes. The program is part of a national collaborative by the Bureau of Primary Health care, and will focus on providing quality and consistent care to all clients with diabetes.