

Living with Diabetes is Difficult but Not Impossible

Contributed by Desmond Nugent - Black College Wire
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Regime includes monitoring blood sugar, watching eating habits and exercise

For James Wallace, director of assessment and career services at Langston University, diabetes runs in the family.

"Diabetes has not skipped a generation in my family," Wallace said. His father and older brother have diabetes; his brother, seven years younger than Wallace, who is 58, died of the disease at 45.

"My brother's death opened my eyes, and it made me reflect on what it is that I need to do if I want to live. He wasn't doing what he was supposed to do," he said.

Watching what you eat is always beneficial, but for people with diabetes, it's not an option. According to the National Diabetes Clearinghouse, diabetes caused the deaths of approximately 224,092 Americans in 2002, making it the sixth-leading cause of death in the United States that year.

Diabetes results when the body does not produce or properly use insulin, a hormone needed to convert sugar, starches and other food into the energy needed for daily life.

Wallace takes his diabetes medicine three times a day. He takes the pills at 7 a.m., 3 p.m. and 10 p.m. To stay active, Wallace helps his wife, Thelma, with her gardening, and as she walks around to "every store in sight" at the mall, he walks along with her for exercise.

There are mainly two types of diabetes: type 1 and type 2. Living with either can be difficult. To prevent complications, diabetics are advised to monitor their blood-sugar level multiple times a day, visit their doctor frequently, watch their eating habits and exercise.
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Type 1 diabetes was previously called insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (IDDM) or juvenile-onset diabetes.

According

to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, type 1 diabetes may account for

5 to 10 percent of all diagnosed cases. The disease hits about one in every 400 to 600 children and adolescents.

Researchers have found that an exposure to an "environmental trigger" can cause type 1 diabetes; for example, an unidentified virus stimulates an attack against cells of the pancreas in some genetically predisposed people.

People who are obese or have a prior history of impaired glucose tolerance, chronic stress, low birth weight or a family history of diabetes are more likely to get type 2 diabetes, which may account for up to 95 percent of all diagnosed diabetes cases.

Symptoms include frequent urination, excessive thirst, unexplained weight loss, extreme hunger, sudden vision changes, tingling or numbness in the hands or feet, feeling very tired much of the time, very dry skin, sores that are slow to heal, more infections than usual, vomiting, nausea and stomach pains.

If not controlled, diabetes can lead to heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure, blindness, kidney disease, nervous system disease, amputations, dental disease and pregnancy complications.

Despite the hardships people with diabetes might face, diabetics are still able to lead fulfilling, long lives.

Hart Jackson-Abanishe, an administrative specialist at Langston University who is 29, has had diabetes since age 17. She uses an insulin pump to measure her blood-sugar level, which she says lowers her risk of further complications. Jackson-Abanishe says she controls her diabetes mainly through exercise.

"My form of exercising is different from everyone else's. I don't drive around campus; if I need to do anything on campus, I walk," Hart said. She also believes in taking the stairs, and if she needs to talk to someone on the phone, she walks to that office.

Karen Clark, chairman of the communications department, was diagnosed with diabetes 20 years ago.

"I have been able to enjoy all the benefits of life, and I have been able to work. The only thing that I have to maintain is my blood-sugar level each day," Clark said.

Clark takes basic diabetes medication and tries to keep her blood sugar at a standard level.

"The hardest part of having diabetes is not being able to enjoy my favorite dessert, cheesecake," she said.

For more information about diabetes, visit
www.diabetes.org

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