



The Impact of Diabetes

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Last week, we discussed diabetes in British Columbia, based on the 2004 Annual Report by

Provincial Health Officer, Dr Perry Kendall. We noted that Type 2 diabetes accounts for 90% of diagnosed cases, typically occurring in adults who are also overweight or obese. Increasingly, it is also being diagnosed in younger people, too. Type 2 diabetes is also mostly preventable.

The best approach to dealing with Type 2 diabetes is to never have to deal with it in the first place. In other words, prevention. Prevention is described as either primary or secondary. Primary prevention comes in two flavours: the high-risk approach, and the population-based approach.

High-risk primary prevention concentrates on people most at risk of developing diabetes. These people generally have impaired glucose tolerance, plus other risk factors —obesity, physical inactivity, smoking, high blood pressure, socio-economic factors, family history, etc. The main elements of the high-risk approach are dietary changes, weight reduction and increased physical activity.

Population-based primary prevention focusses on strategies for the whole population. Key to this strategy are policies and actions that change the environment people work and live in to make the healthy choice the easy choice. They might include encouraging physical activity in schools and workplaces, establishing community supports and providing public education about good health and diabetes.

Secondary prevention involves early diagnosis of Type 2 diabetes, and retarding its progression. Mak-

ing testing simple and cost-effective and ensuring resources are available for screening and treatment are important elements of secondary prevention.

Once Type 2 diabetes has been diagnosed, the goal becomes to manage (treat) the disease. Treatment generally focusses on reducing blood glucose levels. This will reduce the risk of microvascular complications such as kidney and eye disease. Research has shown that exercise and careful diet can improve glucose tolerance and decrease insulin resistance in many patients.

British Columbia figures show that about 69% of people who are diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes are overweight or obese. Recent clinical trials have concluded that the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes can be reduced with appropriate diet and exercise. Moreover, exercise and restriction of food intake will also improve coronary risk factors in those individuals.

Preventing Type 2 diabetes demands a multi-faceted approach which involves both public health, and individual responsibility. Long term efforts, combined with specific action on management by governments and individuals will reduce the incidence of Type 2 diabetes. In turn, this means we will be healthier and the cost of health care will become somewhat more manageable.

Diabetes is not a problem that will go away on its own; action on all levels is needed... including each of us taking some responsibility for our own health. Now you will excuse me as I am going out for a quick walk along the beach!

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