



Healthy diet, exercise can avert diabetes

November is American Diabetes Month, and more than 75,000 people in Hawaii have diabetes. The most common type of diabetes is type 2, which tends to develop with age and increasing body weight.

Dealing with diabetes can be challenging, but it becomes increasingly complicated during the more advanced stages of the disease. Consequently, steps to prevent diabetes or to manage the early stages of it can greatly reduce the pain and suffering that occur as the condition progresses.

Question: Is there such a thing as pre-diabetes?

Answer: Yes. The American Diabetes Association estimates that there are almost as many people with diagnosable pre-diabetes as there are those with diabetes. Pre-diabetes is diagnosed when fasting blood sugar levels are higher than normal but still lower than the cutoff for diabetes. The value of diagnosing pre-diabetes rests in the possibility of preventing the progression to the disease.

Q: What can a person do if they have been diagnosed with pre-diabetes?

A: Basic recommendations for prevention of and treatment of the early stages of the disease are similar: regular physical activity, a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy body weight.

Q: If a diabetic person walks for 30 to 60 minutes daily, can other exercise help to improve their condition?

A: Yes. A study just published in the November Diabetes Care journal by Darcy Cuff and colleagues at the University of British Columbia found that obese women with type 2 diabetes had greater improvement in their signs of diabetes when resistance exercise (strength training) was included in an aerobic exercise program. Two groups of women participated in 75 minutes of exercise three times a week. Both groups experienced improvement in their condition within four months.

However, the group that included resistance exercise had greater improvement in their ability to clear sugar from their blood, lost more body fat and increased their muscle mass more.

Although daily physical activity is probably preferable to exer-

cise three times a week, this study shows that additional value can be obtained by adding resistance exercise to the overall regimen, and strength training programs often find increased strength and muscle mass with only two to three days per week of training.

Q: Are there new dietary recommendations to go along with the resistance training?

A: Another recent study found that increasing low fat sources of protein in the diet of people with untreated diabetes improved their overall blood sugar control. The authors of this study from the Veterans Affairs Medical Center and the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis cautioned that more research is needed to clarify their results.

Q: What can a diabetic or pre-diabetic person do to get help?

A: Ideally, see a certified diabetes educator who can work with your unique conditions and life circumstances. Also, educate yourself. There is a great deal of practical information available at the American Diabetes Association's Web site at www.diabetes.org.

Alan Titchenal, Ph.D., C.N.S. and Joannie Dobbs, Ph.D., C.N.S.
are nutritionists in the Department of Human Nutrition, Food and Animal Sciences,
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, UH-Manoa.
Dr. Dobbs also works with the University Health Services.
