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LivingWell

In most cases is the standard American diet (the SAD diet) and the standard American lifestyle, which is sedentary, stressed and sleep deprived, are the root cause of the problem.

GETTY IMAGES



DIABETES DILEMMA

The prevalent disease is on the rise, but it's also largely preventable



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For the past few years, my best friend and I have gone on annual weekend buddy trips.

We've traveled to Orlando; Washington, D.C.; Atlanta; Madison, Wisconsin; Chicago and the Shenandoah Valley. We talk about the Cubs, Packers, sports issues, our wives, politics and anything that crosses our minds.

I have come to cherish every trip because

I'm not sure how many we have left. My friend has Type 2 diabetes. Although he's lost 50 pounds, he admits he needs to lose more. A new job that has him driving two hours a day doesn't help. Walking is a challenge because he has knee problems. And while he has cut back on Coca-Cola, he still drinks enough of the stuff to make most health-care specialists cringe.

My friend also is a reminder that I need to take better care myself. I'm not skinny and I have had life-long kidney issues.

When I look at diabetes, it makes me be-

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If you go

What: Third Annual Naples Diabetes Conference

Where: Greater Naples YMCA

When: 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday

More info: swfldiabetes.com

Handel

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lieve excess sugar has surpassed cigarettes as the worst thing we put in our bodies. And excess eating isn't too far behind. As Jon Burdzy, president of Lee County Medical Society, said, "We don't do a good job of moderation."

Smoking has gone down, but diabetes is on the rise. One of the main problems is that people weigh too much. It has become such a problem worldwide that there is a term for it - globesity. As a result, the World Diabetes Organization said 400 million people around the globe have the disease.

Diabetes has become so prevalent with youth that our children are at risk of not living longer than us for the first time in two centuries.

"That was unheard of 20 years ago," Burdzy said.

Over the next three weeks, we'll cover this topic through personal stories.

This week we'll share general information about diabetes as well as thoughts from Burdzy; Dr. Brian Taschner, a cardiologist for Lee Health; Dr. Robert Libbey, a nephrologist; and Dr. Trevor Elmquist, an ophthalmologist with Elmquist Eye Group.

They'll also share why people with diabetes are more predisposed to some scary complications including heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, ampu-



Dr. Jon Burdzy



Dr. Brian Taschner

tation and blindness.

There are an estimated 30 million Americans who have diabetes - estimated because it's figured about 25 percent don't know they have the disease.

The numbers go up because of increased awareness but also because people aren't getting healthier. And that's why the No. 1 cause of death for diabetics is heart disease.

"One-third of the population is obese and another one-third is overweight," Taschner said. "That leads to cardiac problems and strokes."

Taschner noted that people with belly fat are more predisposed to diabetes. He said many doctors are overwhelmed with acute issues and have less time to talk about diet and exercised.

"Unfortunately, that's the root of many people's problems," he said. "That's why many doctors refer patients to a dietitian."

With kidneys, consistently high levels of sugar in the blood damage the millions of tiny blood vessels in the organ, Libbey said. This in turn impacts the kidney's ability to filter waste products from blood and keep our electrolytes, such as sodium and potassium, in balance. When the kidney

is damaged it can lead to dangerously high blood pressure, anemia, and eventually kidney failure. When the kidney fails, dialysis is necessary to filter waste products from the body's metabolic function.

The longer a person has diabetes, the more chance there also is of having retinopathy, Elmquist said. "Once it snowballs, that can lead to retinal detachment and blindness," he added.

New government oversight - with payment from third parties - requires primary care physicians to do a diabetic eye exam. While Elmquist likes that preventative medicine, patients can do their part by controlling their blood sugar or hemoglobin A1C.

"Any place that has small blood vessels is more predisposed to diabetes," Elmquist said. "I tell my residents that diabetes is more about the blood vessels than blood sugar. Toes, legs, arms, kidneys, brain or heart have small blood vessels. Diabetes causes a narrowed blood flow and less oxygen."

That means less circulation, which also is harmful in trying to heal wounds while also causing neuropathy.

The amazing thing is diabetes is largely preventable.

Because of more awareness and better medications, people are living longer, Burdzy said. Those who have had gastric-bypass surgery also have done better with the disease, he said.

Beyond that, the specialists said two main things - better diet and more

exercise - can not only control diabetes but eliminate it.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention says 5 percent of 30 million-plus people are Type 1 diabetics. That means about 28.5 million are Type 2 diabetics. With specialists saying 90 percent of diabetes is preventable, that's an estimated 25 million who could say goodbye to the disease by watching what they eat and walking, swimming and working out.

"I've seen eyes get better," Elmquist said. "When you see someone get serious with weight loss and an improved diet, it's like they don't have diabetes anymore."

"We're built to be in a world where we exercise and move. We were made to eat plants and run around a lot."

Burdzy said eating healthy is No. 1 because "You can't out-exercise bad drinks or eating processed foods or eating things that aren't healthy."

Taschner is a huge proponent of a whole-food, plant-based diet. He encourages patients to work toward that while exercising 150 minutes a week, which is a little more than 20 minutes per day.

"If we say 90 percent of it is lifestyle, it's theoretical (that 90 percent is preventable)," he said. "But it's not happening."

Elmquist said he can give tips and Taschner said he can show people the data.

Ultimately, "People have to make that decision," Burdzy said.