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Facts About Diabetes

Diabetes is a serious disease in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin. Insulin is a naturally occurring hormone needed to convert sugar, starches and other food into energy required for daily life. The cause of diabetes is unknown, although genetics and environmental factors, such as obesity and lack of exercise, appear to be factors.

Approximately 17 million people in the United States, or 6.2 percent of the population, have diabetes. Approximately 151,000 diabetics are children.

Proper care and management every day, throughout the day, are essential for people with diabetes. They are at risk of developing serious health complications over time, including heart disease, blindness and stroke. Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States. That is why proper diagnosis and care are so important.

There are two common categories of diabetes. Type 1 diabetics are insulin-dependent, must follow a strict diet and engage in physical activity. Type 1 diabetes is sometimes referred to as juvenile diabetes because it normally develops in children. These children must take daily insulin injections and their glucose levels must be regularly monitored. Each year, more than 13,000 young people are newly diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes.

Type 2 diabetics produce some level of insulin but are unable to properly use it. Type 2 diabetics may be treated with oral medications, but may also require insulin injections. Type 2 diabetes is generally associated with overweight older people, but is increasingly being diagnosed in children and adolescents. Researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that among new cases of childhood diabetes, between 8 percent and 43 percent are diagnosed as Type 2.

Children with diabetes face two potentially significant challenges every day: hyperglycemia and hypoglycemia. Hyperglycemia results when blood glucose levels are too high and hypoglycemia results when these levels are too low. Either can be serious.

School-aged children with diabetes are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These protections require that schools provide necessary accommodations for children with diabetes.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Ga.