

Coloradans urged to change lifestyle and prevent diabetes

Written by Dr. Chris Urbina, executive director and chief medical officer, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

The fallout from the obesity epidemic sweeping Colorado and the nation includes an alarming rise in diabetes. If trends continue, one in three Americans will have type 2 diabetes by 2050, costing the nation trillions in health care and leaving those with diabetes a lifetime of serious health problems.

Estimates show that one in three adult Coloradans have pre-diabetes, meaning their blood sugar levels are high but not high enough to diagnose type 2 diabetes. Without lifestyle changes to improve their health, those with pre-diabetes are likely to develop type 2 diabetes within six years.

As those who have type 2 diabetes know, it requires constant monitoring of blood sugar levels and carries the risk for more serious and costly health problems, such as loss of vision, lower limb amputations and kidney disease.

Coloradans who are overweight and physically inactive with a family history of diabetes are at greater risk for pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes. But that risk does not have to turn into reality. Small steps toward a healthy lifestyle can prevent pre-diabetes from developing into type 2 diabetes and keep Colorado's obesity epidemic from spreading.

A diabetes prevention study showed that people who lose just 5 to 7 percent of their body weight can lower their risk of developing diabetes. For a 200-pound person, that's 10 to 14 pounds. Eating healthy and exercising for just a half-hour five days a week can go a long way in reaching this goal, preventing diabetes and improving overall health.

The Diabetes Prevention Program has been proven to help people with pre-diabetes lower their blood sugar levels and prevent type 2 diabetes. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment has partnered with the YMCA of Metropolitan Denver and community groups across Colorado to offer this program to those at risk.

Taught by trained lifestyle coaches, this 16-week program includes weekly sessions on nutrition, reading food labels, dealing with stress without overeating and increasing physical activity.

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This program can be a potent weapon in the winnable battle against obesity and its consequences. Colorado can lead the nation in turning back the rising tide of obesity with a common-sense approach that emphasizes healthy eating and active living. We can save trillions of health care dollars and ourselves from a lifetime of health consequences by getting screened for pre-diabetes, eating healthily and moving more.

For more information or to enroll in a Diabetes Prevention Program near you, call 1-800-DIABETES.

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