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Why Should You Care About Diabetes?

This is the question the American Diabetes Association is asking the American public as they focus on the deadly complications from diabetes. November is American Diabetes Month, a time to communicate the seriousness of diabetes and the importance of proper diabetes control. Throughout the month, the American Diabetes Association leverages opportunities both nationally and locally to raise awareness about diabetes and its serious complications such as heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, blindness and amputations.

Chances are, you – or someone you love – have been affected by diabetes in some way. But even if you haven't been affected by diabetes, you need to know that diabetes is the biggest public health crisis of the 21st century, and it continues to grow to epidemic proportions. "Diabetes is a very serious condition and nothing to be taken lightly", says South Health District PR Intern, Blair Brown. "Being diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at the age of 10, I had to realize that my health and my future were in my hands. I was affected by this disease at such a young age and now it is my passion to educate others about the symptoms of pre-diabetes, diagnosis and how to properly care for your diabetes to avoid future complications."

Nearly 24 million children and adults in the United States have diabetes. The death rate for diabetes has continued to grow since 1987, while the death rates due to heart disease, stroke and cancer have declined. Having diabetes places a person at increased risk for a number of serious, even life-threatening complications, including:

- Heart disease and stroke - Adults with diabetes have heart disease death rates about 2 to 4 times higher than adults without diabetes.
- Blindness - Diabetic retinopathy causes 12,000 to 24,000 new cases of blindness each year making diabetes the leading cause of new cases of blindness in adults 20-74 years of age.

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- Kidney disease - Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure, accounting for 44% of new cases in 2002.
- Amputations - More than 60% of nontraumatic lower-limb amputations occur in people with diabetes.

Remembering the ‘ABCs of diabetes’ can help prevent or delay the onset of these serious complications:

- A1C - For most people with diabetes, it is important to keep their A1C (average blood glucose level over 2 or 3 months) less than 7 percent.
- Blood Pressure - People with diabetes should have a target blood pressure of less than 130/80 mmHg.
- Cholesterol - LDL (bad) cholesterol should be below 100 mg/dl; HDL (healthy) cholesterol should be above 40 mg/dl for men and 50 mg/dl for women; triglycerides should be below 150 mg/dl.

For more information about diabetes visit www.diabetes.org or www.southhealthdistrict.com/chronic. You may also call your local health department or the Adult Health Office at 229-253-0882.

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