



BEATING THE ODDS

DIABETES &
African-American
WOMEN'S HEALTH

African Americans

AT RISK

THE STATISTICS are cold and hard:

- Roughly 2.6 million, or 11 percent, of African Americans have diabetes, and 35 to 40 percent don't even know it.
- African Americans are nearly twice as likely as non-Hispanic whites to develop diabetes.
- Twenty-five percent of all African Americans between the ages of 65 and 74 have diabetes; for African-American women, 25 percent over age 55 have diabetes.

- African Americans are twice as likely to suffer from diabetes-related blindness. Among people with diabetes, they are 1.5 to 2.5 times more likely to have lower-limb amputations. They are 2.6 to 5.6 times more likely to suffer from kidney disease.
- Diabetes is one of the five leading causes of death for African-American women.

These numbers add up to one thing: Diabetes has reached near-epidemic levels in the African-American population. The rate of diabetes in this group has tripled in the past 30 years. And the toll continues to rise. Although type 2 diabetes commonly develops in people aged 45 and older, it is now on the rise among young people, especially African-American and Latino children.

GEORGE SHELLEY/THE STOCK MARKET

BY JAMES R. GAVIN III, MD, PHD

Why Us?

This is a difficult question to answer. Clearly, there is a genetic component that places ethnic minorities such as African Americans, Latinos, and American Indians at higher risk. But genetics does not account for the entire difference. Likewise, we used to think that the difference might be a higher rate of obesity, a major diabetes risk factor, among African Americans. But like genetics, obesity alone does not sufficiently account for the higher rate of diabetes.

Instead, there appears to be a complex interaction between genetics and environmental factors, such as sedentary lifestyles and calorie-dense, high-fat diets. This lethal combination has led to the disproportionately high rate of diabetes. An equally lethal combination of unawareness, delayed diagnosis, and poor recognition of the seriousness of diabetes has resulted in high rates of its long-term complications.

diabetes facts you should know

Some people with diabetes have symptoms. If you have any of the following symptoms, contact your doctor:

- Extreme thirst
- Frequent urination
- Unexplained weight loss

For more information on diabetes, contact the American Diabetes Association at 1-800-DIABETES (342-2383) or visit the Association's Web site at www.diabetes.org.

Spreading The Word

To address this health crisis, the American Diabetes Association developed its African American Program. Through partnerships with other organizations, churches, and volunteers, the program spreads the word about diabetes and its risk factors, stresses the importance of healthful eating and exercise, and urges those who have been diagnosed to take control of their diabetes.

Pastors at more than 2,000 African-American congregations have spread the gospel of prevention to more than 560,000 people through the program's Diabetes Sunday services. The program also offers other educational initiatives, distributes public service announcements, and participates in an annual awareness campaign with *Ebony* magazine.

Urging Action

Awareness alone is meaningless, however, if it is not accompanied by action. Making African Americans aware that they are at risk is only the first step. We must then urge them to take action by getting screened.

Today, we are working to close the gap between awareness and action. We want to ensure that African Americans have an accessible place, person, or setting to which they can go to get the appropriate testing.

Although widespread community-based screening for diabetes is not considered cost-effective, recent

studies indicate that targeted screening of high-risk groups may be more appropriate. When we have increased both awareness and access to screening at early enough stages, we may start to see cases that are amenable to less-intensive interventions, such as diet and exercise.

Seeking Subjects

Diabetes is not a one-size-fits-all

at-risk weight chart

Height (feet/inches without shoes)	Weight (pounds without clothes)
4'10"	129
4'11"	133
5'0"	138
5'1"	143
5'2"	147
5'3"	152
5'4"	157
5'5"	162
5'6"	167
5'7"	172
5'8"	177
5'9"	182
5'10"	188
5'11"	193
6'0"	199
6'1"	204
6'2"	210
6'3"	216
6'4"	221

If you weigh the same as or more than the amount listed for your height, you may be at risk for diabetes. This chart is based on a measure called the Body Mass Index. The chart shows unhealthy weights for men and women age 35 or older at the listed heights.

disease. To better understand and address the differing characteristics of diabetes among different populations, we need a high level of participation in research studies from members of high-risk groups. If you are in a high-risk ethnic group, you can help—even if you are not personally at high risk for diabetes.



Unfortunately, there is no single source of information about research studies. To find out which studies may need your help, look for announcements in publications such as *Diabetes Forecast*, ask your health care provider, or check out the Web sites for the National

Institutes of Health (www.nih.gov), the National Institute of Diabetes and

Digestive and Kidney Diseases (www.niddk.nih.gov), or the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (www.nhlbi.nih.gov).

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could you have diabetes and not know it?

Sixteen million Americans have diabetes, and one-third of them don't even know it. Take this test to see if you are at risk for having diabetes.

Diabetes Risk Test

Circle the points next to each statement that is true for you. If a statement is not true, circle zero. Add your total score.

Scoring 10 or more points

You are at high risk for having diabetes. Only your health care provider can check to see if you have diabetes. See your health care provider soon and find out for sure.

Scoring 3–9 points

You are probably at low risk for having diabetes now. But don't forget about it—especially if you are Hispanic/Latino, African American, American Indian, Asian American, or

a Pacific Islander. You may be at higher risk in the future. Keep your risk low by losing weight if you are overweight, being active most days, and eating low-fat meals that are high in fruits and vegetables and whole grain foods.

New guidelines recommend that everyone age 45 and over consider being tested for the disease every three years. However, people at high risk should consider being tested at a younger age.

I am a woman who has had a baby weighing more than 9 pounds at birth.	1 pt.	0 pts.
I have a sister or brother with diabetes.	1 pt.	0 pts.
I have a parent with diabetes.	1 pt.	0 pts.
My weight is equal to or above that listed in the At-Risk Weight Chart on page 46.	5 pts.	0 pts.
I am under 65 years of age, and I get little or no exercise.	5 pts.	0 pts.
I am between 45 and 64 years of age.	5 pts.	0 pts.
I am 65 years old or older.	9 pts.	0 pts.

Total Points: _____

