

## ***Diabetes Alert Day—Are You At Risk?***

By

Carolyn Hendry Wyatt, Extension Agent III, Family & Consumer Science/4-H

Diabetes Alert Day, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, observed annually the fourth Tuesday in March, is a one-day wake-up call to inform the American public about the seriousness of diabetes, particularly when diabetes is left undiagnosed or untreated. In this month's column I will define the disease, list symptoms and risk factors of the disease, and available treatments for the disease.

### **What is Diabetes?**

- Diabetes is a common disease that makes it hard for the body to use blood sugar from food we eat for energy. It affects men, women, and children. Insulin, a chemical made by the body in the pancreas, is the "magic wand" that converts the blood sugar into energy. The body may not be producing the "magic wand" insulin, or the insulin is not working. In either case, the blood sugar is not getting into the cells, where it is normally changed into energy.

### **What are the risk factors for developing diabetes?**

- **Heredity:** If one of your parents, grandparents, or siblings had diabetes, you are more likely to have the disease.
- **Obesity:** Being overweight increases your chance of developing diabetes.
- **Age:** Your body makes less insulin as you age.
- **Race:** If you are Hispanic, African American, American Indian, or Asian American, you have a higher risk of developing diabetes.
- **Gestational Diabetes:** If you had diabetes while you were pregnant or gave birth to a baby weighing nine pounds or more, you have a greater risk of developing the disease later in life.

### **What are the symptoms of diabetes? How do I know I might have it?**

- **Need to urinate often (even at night)**
- **Constant thirst or hunger**
- **Weight loss that cannot be explained**
- **Dry or itchy skin**
- **Skin infections**
- **Slow healing of cuts**
- **Nausea or vomiting**
- **Feeling tired or weak**
- **Numbness or tingling in feet or hands**
- **Blurry vision**

Millions of Americans have diabetes, and half of them don't even know it! People with diabetes may have different symptoms. They may experience all, some, or none of the above symptoms. A doctor can determine if you have diabetes. So, visit your doctor and find out!

### **Can diabetes be cured?**

In most cases of diabetes, there is no cure. But diabetes can be controlled. Controlling diabetes means keeping your blood sugar at a normal level. You can do this with a proper diet and regular exercise. Some people may also need insulin injections or medication. By controlling your blood sugar, you reduce your risk of health complications.

In summary, diabetes should not be ignored. Follow up with your family doctor to find out if you have diabetes and how to keep it under control if you have it. Next month's column will have ways to control diabetes through lifestyle and dietary changes. You can contact the American Diabetes Association at 1-800-342-2383 (1-800-DIABETES) for more information, or the Hardee County Extension Office at 863-773-2164. (Source: Elder Nutrition and Food Safety curriculum, Healthy Living for Elders: Diabetes.)