

Rising diabetes rate leaves 'a lot to be done,' doctor says

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We know more than ever about diabetes, how to treat it and how to prevent it.

So Dr. William Kaye couldn't help but be disappointed Wednesday when federal health officials raised their estimate of how many Americans have diabetes to nearly 26 million - a 9 percent jump over the last estimate in 2008.

"It's sadly not shocking. It's not surprising," Kaye said. "It's disappointing.

"There's still a lot to be done," said Kaye, who opened his endocrinology practice on Flagler Drive in 1985 and has been busy ever since.

By the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's latest count, about 1 in 12 Americans has diabetes, a debilitating disease in which the body has difficulty processing sugar. Another 79 million adults are estimated to be on the verge of the disease - a condition called "prediabetes."

Health officials say the 2.2 million jump is because more people are developing Type 2 diabetes related to obesity and more are living longer with the disease - the nation's seventh-leading cause of death.

Kaye and his partners have plenty of patients in their 80s who are managing the disease and avoiding heart disease, blindness and kidney disease, all of which can develop as a result of diabetes.

"When I started in 1992, we had one class of drugs to tackle diabetes," said Dr. Barry Horowitz, Kaye's associate at Palm Beach Diabetes and Endocrine Specialists. Doctors now can turn to six classes of drugs that tackle the disease in different ways.

But up to half of the increase the CDC is noting could be due to the growing use of an additional blood sugar test, said Ann Albright, director of the CDC's Division of Diabetes Translation.

The additional test, for glycated (or A1c) hemoglobin, is "less burdensome," Albright said.

The test quickly measures average blood sugar levels for the past two to three months and does not require a person to fast, guzzle unpleasant sugar drinks and then wait for a blood test to get results.

The new estimates calculate that 1.9 million more people ages 20 and older were diagnosed in 2010. More than a million of those are ages 45 to 64. The disease costs \$174 billion annually, according to the CDC.

Albright said she hopes the announcement spurs Americans to do more to prevent and manage diabetes.

People should begin by knowing whether they are at risk. Risk factors for Type 2 diabetes include obesity, a family history of diabetes, a sedentary lifestyle and older age. African-Americans, Hispanics and American Indians face an increased threat.

Those at risk should consider changing the way they live.

"Those messages about eating healthy and being physically active have been out there, but it's not as hard as it might sound," Albright said.

Palm Beach Gardens dietitian Christine Bandy, a certified diabetes educator, agrees.

"Just a 5 percent reduction in weight can make really good changes in blood sugar," Bandy said. "I really try to get across the need for a healthy balance and long-term perspective."

Those at risk should change a few bad eating habits at a time, she said. "You change 50 things at once and people are not going to follow through."

Still, Kaye worries the message is getting lost.

"I have my degree of skepticism about how things are going," he said. "In one instance, we hear we should be thin and fit, and in the other we're bombarded by the advertisements."

"Look at Saturday morning TV for kids. There's a junk-food commercial every few minutes. These influence our eating habits. If our advertising cues are stronger than our educational cues, diabetes follows."

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