

the healthy swimmer



Mark Harmel / Photo Researchers, Inc.

More than 5 Million Americans Have Diabetes But Don't Know It

Diabetes is the fifth deadliest disease in the United States, affecting more than 18 million Americans and killing 213,000 people annually. Yet millions of people go about their daily lives unaware that they have the disease or its precursor, according to the American Diabetes Association.

Approximately 41 million Americans have pre-diabetes, which means that their blood glucose (sugar) is higher than normal, but not high enough to be classified as diabetes. Without intervention, individuals with pre-diabetes are at a much higher risk for developing the disease.

People with type 2 diabetes may not see warning signs at the time that they develop the disease, and may live for years without realizing they have it. Symptoms may include frequent urination, blurred

vision and excessive thirst. However, type 2 diabetes may only become evident if more serious complications arise, such as heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, eye damage and nerve damage.

"With early detection and treatment, diabetes can be managed, and its devastating complications can be prevented or delayed," says Catherine Tibbetts, RN, MPH, CDE, president of Health Care & Education for the American Diabetes Association.

To help people recognize risk factors for type 2 diabetes, the association provides a simple, seven-question diabetes risk test. The test, in English or Spanish, is available in brochure form by calling the association toll-free at 800-DIABETES (800-342-2383) or can be taken online at www.diabetes.org/risk-test.jsp. <<< >>> For additional information about diabetes, visit the ADA web site at www.diabetes.org.

Osteoporosis Patients Tend to Discontinue Treatment That Can Help

A new survey from the Alliance for Aging Research highlights the importance of physicians understanding why women patients seek treatment for osteoporosis so that they can better motivate patients to take the medication long term. In the survey, patients with osteoporosis said they were motivated to treat the disease to remain healthy and independent. However, a majority of physicians surveyed believe the fear of breaking bones was the principal motivator for treatment.

"It's clear that better doctor-patient communication is needed since doctors aren't tapping into the emotional catalysts that drive women to protect their bones, and by extension, their independence," says Daniel Perry, executive director of the Alliance for Aging Research.

More than 44 million Americans are

affected by, or are at risk for, osteoporosis—a disease that causes bones to become thinner, more fragile and more likely to break. Other studies show that half to two-thirds of osteoporosis patients discontinue taking medications within one year, citing side effects, lack of perceived benefits and taking too many pills for other diseases. But research has shown that lack of persistence in taking osteoporosis medications can result in increased risk for fractures and healthcare costs.

"Physicians and patients need to be speaking a common language to encourage more patients to start and stay on their osteoporosis medication since medication won't work if you don't take it," says Perry.

To improve the communication process, the Alliance for Aging Research has developed a free discussion guide for use by patients and physicians during office visits. The guide provides questions, tips and advice to facilitate better communication



Princess Margaret Rose Orthopaedic Hospital / Photo Researchers, Inc.

and understanding of osteoporosis risks, preventions and treatment. <<<

>>> To receive the free guide, go to www.agingresearch.org. For additional information, visit the National Osteoporosis Foundation at www.nof.org.



Antonio M. Rosario/Icónica

High-Altitude Living May be Fountain of Youth

People who live in the mountains may have longer life expectancies than people living at lower altitudes, according to a recent report in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. The findings are based on research involving 1,150 inhabitants of three villages near Athens, Greece. One of the villages is located in a mountain region about 1,000 meters above sea level, while the other two villages are located in the lowlands.

Researchers tracked cardiovascular health, risk factors and death rates over a 15-year period—and the results were surprising. Compared with their peers living in the plains, the mountain dweller group initially showed higher coronary heart disease risk, including higher rates of circulating blood lipids and higher blood pressure. However, the mountain dwellers ultimately had a lower death rate and lower incidence of death from heart disease.

The researchers concluded that the results could most likely be attributed to other “protective” factors, such as long-term physiological changes from living at higher altitudes, and the cardiovascular benefits of walking uphill regularly on rugged terrain.

The *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* is a peer review journal for health professionals and researchers. <<<

>>> To read other health-related features, visit <http://jech.bmjournals.com>.

Exercise May Trump Pills for Pain Management

Most patients taking pain medication would be better served by a regimen of corrective exercises, according to Philadelphia fitness expert Jared Carter.

“Too many doctors today reach for the prescription pad when they see a patient with chronic pain, rather than suggesting alternative therapies,” notes Carter, a certified strength and conditioning specialist. “Chronic pain is often the result of muscle weakness, or it is the result of an injury caused by muscle weakness. When doctors order pain medication for the patient, they are treating the symptoms and not the cause. Nothing is solved with this approach,” he says.

Although much attention has been directed to COX-2 inhibitor drugs (e.g., Celebrex, Vioxx) for the treatment of pain, Carter says, “studies have shown that these drugs increase the risk of heart attack.” Leading pain-management clinics, such as Stanford University, University of California, San Francisco and the Wasser Pain Management Center agree that treating pain strictly with drugs is not the way to approach the situation.

Swimming is a good activity for pain management, Carter affirms with enthusiasm.

“I’m trying to encourage some clients to swim more because of overuse injuries. Swimming is one of the best activities because you’re using so many different muscle groups. You burn a lot of calories, and it’s a low-impact activity.” Rowing is another activity recommended by Carter, who participates in this sport for his own health and fitness. <<<

>>> For more information about Carter’s corrective exercise approach to health and fitness, visit www.moveforwardfitness.com.



Image Source/Getty Images

Finding the Right Weight for Optimum Health

People who are overweight but not obese actually may have a lower risk of death than people of normal weight, according to a report published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Using data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, researchers estimated relative risks of mortality associated with different levels of body mass index (calculated as weight in kilograms divided by the square of height in meters).

The study concluded that underweight and obesity, particularly higher levels of obesity, were associated with increased mortality relative to the normal to slightly overweight category. The impact of obesity on mor-

tality may be decreasing, due to improvements in public health and medical care. Despite this information, physicians continue to remind their patients that this data does not allow a return to the buffet tables or reducing exercise. Sedentary lifestyles may be more of a risk factor than being overweight.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that overweight and obese individuals are at increased risk for many diseases and health conditions, including hypertension, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea, respiratory problems and certain cancers. <<<

>>> For more information, visit www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/obesity/ob_home.htm.

READERS ASK:

Do you have a health- or fitness-related question to pose to our health and medical professionals?

Send to editor@usms.org, or mail to Readers Ask, c/o Bill Volckening, 1220 NW 119th Place, Portland, OR 97229.