

HEALTH

EXPERTS TESTIFY BEFORE CONGRESS ON HIGH RATE OF DIABETES IN MINORITIES

ALEXANDRIA, VA.—Health experts testified before Congress today on the alarmingly high and disproportionate incidence of diabetes in Hispanics, Black Americans and American Indians, at a hearing convened today by the U.S. House Select Committee on Aging.

Diabetes has been identified by U.S. Surgeon General Antonia Noella, M.D., as a leading

health concern for Hispanics, the fastest-growing population in the United States. In addition, the following statistics have been compiled by the American Diabetes Association:

- It is estimated that in excess of 2.5 million Hispanics have diabetes in the United States.
- 1 in every 10 Hispanics has diabetes.
- 1 in every 10 Black Americans has diabetes.

An estimated 3 million Black Americans have diabetes. • Black Americans also experience higher rates of at least three of the serious complications of diabetes, including blindness, amputation, and end-stage renal disease (kidney failure). • Diabetes has also reached epidemic proportions among American Indians. • Diabetes and its complications are major causes

of death and health problems in most American Indian populations. • One tribe, the Pimas of Arizona, are 300 percent more likely to have diabetes.

"There is a critical need for increased federal funding in order to ensure access to medical care for early intervention, create much-needed culturally sensitive public education programs, and increase funding for

diabetes research specific to minority populations," said Jay S. Skyler, M.D., President of the American Diabetes Association.

In Conjunction with the hearing, U.S. Representative Edward R. Raybal (D-CA), Chairman of the U.S. House Select Committee on Aging, has issued a report on the threat of diabetes to the Hispanic population.

Health experts testifying at the hearing included James R. Gavin, III, M.D., Ph.D., Vice President of the American Diabetes Association, Joyce Knows His Gun, sister of the Honorable Ben Nighthorse Campbell (D-CO), Dr. Antonio Linares, Medical Director, Aetna Health Plans of San Diego, and representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. General Accounting

Office.

Written testimony was also provided for the record from additional experts, including William Roper, M.D., Director of the Centers for Disease Control.

Diabetes is the fourth-leading cause of death by disease in the United States.

This year alone, 750,000 new cases will be diagnosed and 150,000 people will die as a result of diabetes and its complications.

The American Diabetes Association is the nation's leading voluntary health association supporting diabetes research and public education services. Founded in 1940 as a medical society, the Association has an affiliate office in every state and activities in more than 800 communities.

EXERCISE MAY LESSEN THE EFFECTS OF AGING IN MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN

DALLAS— New research suggests that exercise can retard the adverse changes in risk factors for coronary heart disease that typically occur in middle-aged women.

In the three-year study, women who increased their physical activity had the smallest increases in weight. Those women also tended to have the smallest decrease in levels of HDL (high density lipoprotein) cholesterol and an important and beneficial subfraction of the molecule called HDL2, according to a report in the April issue of *Circulation*, an American Heart Association scientific journal.

Excess weight is known to be a risk factor for hypertension (high blood pressure) and coronary heart disease. And HDL is often referred to as the "good" cholesterol carrier because it is shown to be associated with reduced heart disease risk.

"Exercise appears to slow the decline in HDL cholesterol that's seen with aging women," says Jane F. Owens, Dr. P.H., epidemiologist and principal author of the study from the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh (Pa.).

"Since high HDL levels are protective — that is, higher HDL levels are associated with lower morbidity and mortality from heart disease — we may be able to prevent some premature heart disease by slowing the decline in HDL levels."

The changes in HDL and HDL2 due to exercise were "largely independent" of changes in body weight, Owens and her colleagues found. When the researchers statistically adjusted for weight lost or gained by the women, physical activity by itself still seemed to slow the decline in HDL cholesterol levels, she explains.

Middle age, especially after menopause, is a time when the death rate from heart disease increase in women.

"I am not aware of any other study that has looked at changes in physical activity at this time of increased risk for women and has reported an association between increasing activity and HDL levels," says Owens.

The findings suggest that if women increase their level of physical activity they will improve the status of their risk factors, the scientists say.

"Stay active," Owens advises the millions of "baby boomers" who will be entering middle age soon. "At least try to walk for 20 minutes three times a week." This, she says, should burn

about 300 calories per week.

"Even a moderate increase in exercise such as walking this amount — one that is reasonable for most women in this age group — seems to be protective in terms of maintaining HDL cholesterol levels," she says.

Participants in the research, called the Healthy Women Study, are "exceptionally enthusiastic and cooperative because they recognize the lack of research on women of that age," says Owens. Even many of the women who have moved away from the Pittsburgh area have remained in the study, she adds.

Participants ranged in age from 42 to 50 (average: 47) when they entered the study.

At the beginning and end of the first three-year study period, the women answered a physical activity questionnaire, as well as standard psychological questionnaires that ranked them in terms of how stressed (Cohen Perceived Stress Scale and "blue" or sad) Beck Depression

Inventory) they felt.

The women who reported increasing their physical activity seemed to have smaller increases in both stress and depression, the researchers report. "Taken together," they say, "these results suggest that physical activity has a positive impact on indexes of mental health in middle-aged women."

In future research, Owens

plans to study another problem that has not received much attention in this age group — risks associated with increasing physical activity during middle age.

There was a "fairly low" level of injury in this study, the researcher says. Seven percent (38 of 500) of the women reported injuries (none serious) have they thought were directly related to their exercise pattern.



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