

Black women face epidemic of adult diabetes

By Siobhan Benet
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Cases of Type II diabetes, which occurs almost entirely in adults, are on the rise for all Americans, but African-American women are being hit particularly hard.

Of the 15.7 million men and women diagnosed with all forms of diabetes more than half are women and more than half of them are African-American.

"The increase in diabetes rates has a lot to do with the rise in obesity, our sedentary lifestyles and the fact that people are living longer,"

says Joanne Gallivan, director of the National Diabetes Education Program at the National Institutes of Health.

According to the Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston, adult men and women of all races are about eight pounds heavier than they were in 1985. In fact, one of every two Americans is overweight.

Ninety percent of people with Type II diabetes are overweight, according to Dr. Terry Maratos-Flier, chief of the section on obesity at the Joslin Diabetes Center. "Certainly that is no coincidence."

Obesity rates for Black

women are particularly high. The Black Women's Health Project, for example, reports that out of every 100 Black women, 67 are overweight and 38 of those overweight women are obese. (The Joslin Diabetes Center says a person is considered obese when he or she is 20 percent or more above her or his ideal body weight.)

"Many people eat to self-medicate," says Dr. Maratos-Flier. "They are using food to treat their depression, loneliness and anger."

Diabetes is a disease in which the body does not pro-

duce or make proper use of insulin, a hormone that converts sugar, starches and other food into energy.

Type I, or juvenile, diabetes primarily affects children and young adults. People with Type I diabetes must take daily insulin injections to survive. Cases of Type I diabetes are often attributed to genetics. The number of Type I diabetes cases totals around 5 to 10 percent of all diagnosed diabetes cases.

On the other hand, Type II diabetes accounts for more than 90 percent of all diabetes cases worldwide. And the

numbers continue to rise. A report released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the American Diabetes Association says that diabetes increased by a record 6 percent between 1998 and 1999. And the prevalence of diagnosed diabetes, including gestational diabetes (a temporary condition during pregnancy), increased 33 percent from 1990 to 1998, with the largest increase occurring among people aged 30 to 39.

If left untreated, Type II diabetes can lead to blindness, amputation of limbs, kidney disease, stroke and heart attack—all potentially deadly.

The issue of food is critical. Medicating the blues with food and the need to rely on inexpensive food, often higher in fat and lower in nutrition—has potentially

deadly consequences for Black women.

"High-fat diets, super-sized portions and lack of physical activity are resulting in extremely high rates of Type II diabetes in Black women," says Leslie Curtis of Sisters Together, a program of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases last October.

The National Women's Health Information Center reports that Black women over 55 are almost twice as likely as White women to have diabetes.

Diabetes affects African-Americans, both women and men, at a rate nearly double that of White Americans. And the death rates for African-Americans with diabetes are 2.5 times higher than for their White counterparts.

Education

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American Way, would have awarded a \$1,500 federal voucher to parents who want to transfer their children from failing public schools to private or parochial schools.

Voucher supporters tried to frame the issue as parents' rights to school choice. But opponents primarily argued the unfairness of taking federal money from already suffering public schools for private school vouchers. Furthermore, they noted that \$1,500 would not cover the cost of attending a private school.

Opponents also pointed out that even if vouchers prevailed, America must still support the 95 percent of children left in public schools. Those schools would have an even greater problem trying to operate with the loss of so many highly motivated students.

Public opposition to vouchers was so strong that the idea lost footing last

spring with an unusual bipartisan blow from the House Education and Workforce Committee, which voted it down 27-20.

In the final version of the bill approved by Congress, parents will have a choice of federal money for tutoring, summer school programs or transportation to another public school if a child is doing poorly.

School districts will also have the flexibility to transfer half of their federal funds between programs as needed.

The bill also requires annual standardized testing of students in grades three to eight to measure student performance in reading and math and to pinpoint failing schools.

"The testing and accountability measures in the final package have been improved dramatically," Chase says. "As a result, states are directed to use high-quality tests and to provide parents and policymakers informa-

tion that provides a more complete picture of student learning - not just one test score."

Quentin Lawson, NABSE executive director, says the organization has never opposed standardized tests, but has carefully monitored the fairness of them to Black children. "We see it as one measure of an assessment of how students are progressing," he says.

"But the written test is only one instrument of measuring a student's growth."

Past studies have shown that Black children are doing especially poorly on tests.

The results of last year's National Assessment of Educational Progress showed that since 1992, fourth-graders overall averaged a score of 217 on a 500-point test. But, Black students have consistently remained at 193, which is 32 points below that of Whites.

Secretary of Education Rod Paige, formerly superintendent of Houston public

schools, has fought adamantly for standardized testing. He has consistently stated that Black children have scored poorly on tests because they haven't been taught.

"The 'Leave No Child Behind Act' offers the U.S. Department of Education a powerful set of tools in our effort to meet the needs of America's neediest students," Paige says.

"The bill raises the quality of the education we provide our students and offers that high quality education to every child."

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), the Senate's education committee chair, says, "For students already doing well in school, this bill will help them do even better. But, this bill also directs more resources to the students who need help the most. We succeeded in putting aside partisan differences, and found common ground to help students and enable all schools to improve."

NAARPR

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to be built "basically on word of mouth."

The announcement exhorted the community to participate: "While we know it is difficult for people to have the courage to stand up and speak out, the failure to do this now will result in inability to do it later," it said. It went on to admonish members of the community that "if you are not a part of the solution, you are a part of the problem."

Then NAARPR intensified its rhetoric.

In a press release issued on Monday morning last week, the group accused what it said were "many in this country" of using the tragedy of September 11 "to institute the most reactionary neofascist repressive program possible in the history of this country."

"We are faced," the NAARPR asserted, with "people being detained with no charges," something it said "has not been seen since Nazi Germany," and "few in the Congress," it continued, "have had the courage to stand up and say no."

Offering what it says is an example "of what's really going on," NAARPR charged that "the real supporters of the Taliban and the al Qaeda network were not the Afghan people, but were really George Bush, Sr., and his British counterparts."

Claiming that "large demonstrations" in major U.S. cities have been "totally ignored by the major media," NAARPR said it has been "working with the Coalition For International Peace," it said, "to begin to make people aware of what is

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—Dr. James Tate, NAARPR Executive Director

really going on in the country and who is responsible for it."

The two groups met the next day at the West Las Vegas Library to "develop a strategy," according to NAARPR, "for combating this nationwide media black out and for joining with other organizations" that, it said, "have been mobilizing to prevent a return to Fascism and a return to McCarthyism."

"With our folks, we often think that if we hide in the tall grass, the beast won't know we're there," Tate lamented, speaking specifically about African-Americans. "We're not all in the same boat," he said. "Bush has done nothing to stop racial profiling, or the murders of black people, for that matter."

"The Alliance was the organization that started calling people about this," Tate explained, saying he had been pleased by the turnout of about thirty individuals who attended the meeting.

Taliban

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Regardless of what Malcolm would say, the question now is what will be the fate of Walker, who surrendered near the Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif during a prison uprising in late November. He is being held by Marines at a U.S. military camp. He is said to be giving useful information to American authorities.

Meanwhile, Zacarias Moussaoui, a brown-skinned French citizen who could blend in as an African-American on any American street, has become the only living suspect in the United States formally linked to the September terror attacks.

Moussaoui is awaiting trial in an Alexandria, Va., jail as his court-appointed attorney challenged the government's case and claimed Moussaoui has been mistreated while incarcerated.

As for Walker, Collins strongly believes that his Uncle Malcolm could have helped guide Walker's life. "I am willing to guarantee you this young man went [to Afghanistan] with the so-called knowledge that he had, wanting the romanticism and the experience and to be with these people. He did whatever that pleased them and he fell into this."

"It went very well," another NAARPR official remarked. "We're planning some strategies, looking at various channels we can use to get the message out to the public regarding the erosion of their human and civil rights," he said. "It was very productive."

"We came up with a mission statement, and a name," said Tate. The two groups will work together as The Coalition to Stop the Erosion of Human Rights. "The name sort of speaks to the mission statement," he said.

The mission statement reads: "We are a coalition of individuals and organizations who are committed to the education and protection of the public against the erosion of civil and/or human liberties and rights that has been caused by the passage of laws and implementation of policies in the name of enhancing national security."

Weeks before the meeting, NAARPR had promised that those who attended would learn "what is really going on in terms of the hearts of the people of this country," and had issued an advisory.

"We will be planning for our next activity, a mass rally to occur early in the next year," it said.

"Hopefully, it will be in February," Tate said of the rally. "We've got another organizational meeting on January eighth," he continued, saying details about that meeting will be forthcoming.

For more information, contact the National Alliance at 382-5344.