Diabetes on the Rise

Q: Does eating too much sugar cause diabetes?
Sugar itself is not the culprit when it comes to diabetes. However, eating too much sugar can lead to obesity, which is a major risk factor for developing Type 2 diabetes and other diseases. Eating a healthy diet (which means limiting your refined sugar intake) and maintaining an active lifestyle are key to preventing Type 2 diabetes, especially if you have a family history of the disease.

Q: What’s the difference between Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes?
Type 1 diabetes is a genetic disease that is not preventable. Symptoms typically begin in childhood or young adulthood. With Type 1, the body’s immune system destroys the cells that release insulin, eventually eliminating insulin production from the body. Without insulin, cells cannot absorb sugar (glucose), which they need to produce energy.

Type 2 diabetes typically occurs in adulthood, though more children are being diagnosed every year. The body has too little insulin or cannot use insulin effectively. Type 2 can be prevented or delayed with a healthy lifestyle, including maintaining a healthy weight, eating sensibly, and exercising regularly.

Q: I was just told I have prediabetes. Do I have anything to worry about?
Having prediabetes puts you at very high risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. The good news is that you can do something about it. Research suggests that you can cut your risk for developing Type 2 diabetes by 58 percent if you lose 7 percent of your body weight and exercise moderately for 30 minutes a day, five days a week.

Q: Are people with diabetes more likely to get a cold or the flu?
Having diabetes does not make you more vulnerable to getting a cold or the flu. However, any type of illness can make diabetes more difficult to control.

Q: Can people with diabetes eat sweets or chocolate?
If eaten as part of a healthy meal plan and combined with an active lifestyle, people with diabetes can eat sweets and desserts. They are no more “off limits” to people with diabetes than they are to people without it. The key to sweets is to have a very small portion and save them for special occasions so you focus your meal on more healthful foods.

Resources: advocatehealth.com; diabetes.org; cdc.gov/diabetes/ndep/pdfs/faithleaders_toolkit.pdf

Reduce the Risk of Diabetes

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that there are 29.1 million Americans living with diabetes. Stephanie Adams, a registered nurse at Advocate Trinity Hospital in Chicago, says preventative care is key and noncompliance is the number one reason patients return to the hospital.

The leading cause of type 2 diabetes is excess weight. Losing weight can help cut your chances of developing diabetes. Working your muscles more often and making them work harder improves their ability to use insulin and absorb glucose. The Nurses’ Health Study and Health Professionals Follow-up Study recommends a brisk walk for a half hour daily reduces the risk by 30 percent.

The National Institutes for Health (NIH) suggests physical family activities and to keep TV and computer time to two hours or less each day.

Preventative measures can help lower the risk of other health related problems including heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and vision loss. Eating certain foods in moderation is key to monitoring diabetes.

Suggested dietary changes:
• Choose whole grains
• Refrain from drinking sugar loaded beverages
• Choose vegetable oils, nuts and seeds
• Limit red and processed meat
• Eat smaller meal and snacks

Your faith community can help! Be intentional about the meals you share together and make sure there are healthy options. Follow the steps to become a Let’s Move! congregation that supports physical activity. Hold a healthy foods cook-off to challenge members to have fun while thinking outside the box about the food they prepare and eat. When we make changes together and bring in our faith commitments and practices, we are more successful!

Dear God, we thank you for the communities in which we have conversations, share meals and support each other. Remind us to guard and cherish these relationships. Amen.