

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Kansans Confront the Growing Risk Factors for Diabetes

November is National Diabetes Awareness Month. Unfortunately, diabetes has become more common, particularly Type 2 diabetes. We are likely all familiar with someone who has diabetes. It touches most families, and the impacts of the disease are staggering. Diabetes affects the whole person, and left uncontrolled, can lead to a host of chronic health problems, including heart disease, kidney failure, blindness, neuropathy, foot complications, and many others.

In Kansas, the number of people diagnosed with diabetes is increasing. According to the American Diabetes Association, more than 257,900 adults in Kansas—about 10.3% of the adult population—have been diagnosed with diabetes. Each year, there are an estimated 17,000 new cases of diabetes, and the economic toll is staggering: \$3.3 billion annually, including direct medical costs and lost productivity.

As staggering as these numbers are, 1 in 3 adults has prediabetes, and many don't know they are in danger of developing the disease.

The most common risk factors for prediabetes include:

- Being 45 years or older
- Being overweight or obese
- Having a parent or sibling with Type 2 diabetes
- Physical inactivity
- Having had gestational diabetes or giving birth to a baby weighing over 9 pounds
- Belonging to certain racial or ethnic groups: African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian, Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, or Asian American

While there are some risk factors you cannot change, there are things you can do to reduce your risk.

- People who lose 5%-7% of their body weight reduce their risk for developing Type 2 diabetes by 58%.
- Get more exercise. Getting 150 minutes of moderate exercise also helps your body move glucose from your blood to your cells, and it also helps reduce insulin resistance.
- Focus on your eating habits. Concentrate on eating more whole foods and fewer processed foods, which tend to be higher in fat and sodium. Eat more whole grains, non-starch vegetables, and healthy fats. Also, remember to consider your portion sizes.

Diabetes is a growing health concern, but it doesn't have to be in your future. Talk to your healthcare provider about your risk factors and discuss things you can do to reduce your chance of developing Type 2 diabetes. Small lifestyle changes can make a significant impact on your health.