

Erin Billups: It's estimated about 29 million Americans, children and adults, have diabetes. Their body is unable to properly regulate blood sugar, if left untreated it can lead to blindness, amputations, and even death. Joining me now to raise awareness and talk prevention, is the director of inpatient diabetes at Lenox Hill Hospital; Dr. Minisha Sood. Welcome, Dr. Sood.

Dr. Sood: Thank you for having me.

Erin Billups: So, there are a large number of New Yorkers who may not even realize they have diabetes and many more with prediabetes. Can you paint a picture of how big of a public health issue this is?

Dr. Sood: It's a huge Public Health concern. So, as you mentioned; there's about 29 million Americans who have diabetes, and about 20 million Americans who are yet undiagnosed.

Erin Billups: Wow.

Dr. Sood: And if current trends continue by the year 2050, one in three Americans over the age of 20 will have diabetes. Now the larger untapped population, which is where this epidemic is going to stem from, beyond where is already, are the persons with prediabetes. So, there are about 86 million Americans with prediabetes, and only 11% of them actually know about their diagnosis.

Erin Billups: So who's at risk? Many times we think of someone who's overweight but that's not always the case, right?

Dr. Sood: You're right. It's not always the case. So, about 85% of diabetics are overweight or obese, and when specifically talking about type 2 diabetes with that statistic, and that leaves about 15% of people with type 2 diabetes who are not overweight or obese, and so many times in that situation we're talking about genetics, food intake, and other environmental factors that may be contributing to the diagnosis.

Erin Billups: Well, are there signs and symptoms of someone that - who might have pre-diabetes that will alert them to that?

Dr. Sood: Some pre diabetics do have high blood sugars after meals, and their blood sugar's off and on routine blood testing isn't that elevated when they go to the doctor's office and have a fasting blood sample. So sometimes, symptoms of blood sugar elevation or even dips and blood sugar after meals could be a telltale sign.

Erin Billups: What are some of those symptoms?

Dr. Sood: So a symptom of low blood sugar after meal could be; profound fatigue or sudden lethargy, maybe even dizziness or sweating or palpitations. Those could be signs that the body

is having trouble regulating its insulin production. Maybe making too much at times, and too little at other times, and that dysglycemia as we call it, or abnormal normal blood sugar pattern, is the first telltale sign of prediabetes.

Erin Billups: So if someone's feeling super tired all the time, they should go get checked out. I know some people, many times will like, cut gluten out, and say "oh, I have so much more energy" but that may not even be the cause.

Dr. Sood: Right. There are many causes of fatigue. Including not only high blood sugar, but lack of sleep, and lack of exercise believe it or not, poor thyroid function, I mean the list goes on, but some symptoms of high blood sugar could be increased urination, increased thirst, unexplained weight loss, and lethargy, as you say.

Erin Billups: And if you catch this early, pre-diabetes, you can reverse damage and kind of turned things around, right?

Dr. Sood: Absolutely. It's much easier to stem the tide at the pre-diabetic level, than it is once someone has full-blown diabetes, and naturally will alter the course of the complications for a patient's future if we catch it early.

Erin Billups: But I've even known some diabetics who, once they start changing their diet and taking the right medications, are able to really turn things around as well, right?

Dr. Sood: Yes, and as an endocrinologist; that's the most satisfying experience to have, is to help somebody garner the tools and then to use them to reverse their disease or even, at least, control it.

Erin Billups: There have been reports recently that the FDA is taking a closer look at our sugar consumption. They're proposing to change how sugar labels, the nutrition labels, display sugar amounts and the caps there. How much sugar do Americans usually take in, and how much should we, and how does that affect the diabetes picture in the country?

Dr. Sood: That's a great question. So, the sugar consumption is markedly higher than it was in previous decades and, you know, a common misconception, among diabetics anyway, is that sugar-free snacks are appropriate, and the truth is, is that sugar-free snacks also often contain sugar alcohols. Which can be upsetting to the gastrointestinal system and cause gas and bloating and maybe even flatulence. And they also contain carbohydrates, and carbohydrates are starches. They're absorbed as blood sugar and converted to sugar in the body, and so, sugar-free snacks do actually raise blood sugar. So I think changes to nutrition labels are very important, and alerting Americans as to what percentage of the diet should be comprised of sugar, because that's the piece of information missing from nutrition labels right now. So, I think for snacks, it's appropriate to have a snack containing ideally less than 10 grams of sugar per serving, and again, it's important to pay attention to the serving size on the package label.

Erin Billups: Okay, and there are other things that have sugar in it that, other than the non-sugar or low-fat items, that people should pay attention to, right? Anything else you can think of?

Dr. Sood: Right. Absolutely. So, sauces such as; BBQ sauce or salad dressings, many times will contain sugar. Certain types of takeout food where corn starch is used in the sauce making process will elevate the blood sugar. Ketchup is a big source of sugar, as is tomato sauce, so you know, patients might not necessarily connect those condiments, or sauces, or food additives, to an elevated blood sugar level, but it all comes together and contributes to the end glucose level.

Erin Billups: You know, and obviously there's probably some correlation between how much more sugar is in our diet as Americans, and the increase in diabetics across the country.

Dr. Sood: It is. Americans consume an inordinate amount of sugar. I recently had the opportunity to go to get a kindergarten class, and to speak to them about sugar intake, and I was surprised that the conversation in America, thankfully, has changed a lot. These five-year-olds really were pretty aware of the sugar content.

Erin Billups: Really?

Dr. Sood: Of juices, and sodas, and snacks, and they knew how to make the right choices, and so, I'm really hopeful that the trend is changing, but action needs to take place now.

Erin Billups: Well at least the future looks a little brighter for our young ones. Dr. Sood; thank you so much for joining me today.

Dr. Sood: Thank you for having me.