# *The Diabetes Epidemic Among African Americans**

**What is diabetes?**
Diabetes is a chronic metabolic disease in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin, a hormone that is needed to convert sugar, starches, and other food into energy.

**How many African Americans have diabetes?**
- Over 2.2 million African Americans have diabetes; 1.5 million have been diagnosed and 730,000 have not yet been diagnosed.
- There are 4 times as many African Americans diagnosed with diabetes today as there were in 1968.
- For every 6 white Americans who have diabetes, 10 African Americans have the disease.
- Among African Americans 20 years and older, the prevalence of diabetes is 8.2 percent compared with 4.8 percent among non-Hispanic whites.

**What is the prevalence by type of diabetes?**
- Type 1 diabetes accounts for 5 to 10 percent of all cases.
- Type 2 diabetes accounts for 90 to 95 percent of all cases.

**What is the prevalence of diabetes by gender?**
- In every age group the prevalence of diabetes is higher among African American women than among African American men.
- Among African Americans 20 years or older, 11.8 percent of women and 8.5 percent of men have diabetes.
- Nearly one out of three African American women ages 65 to 74 years has diabetes.

**What is the prevalence by age?**
- Diabetes is particularly common among middle-aged and older African American adults.
- The proportion of the African American population that has diabetes rises from less than 1 percent for those younger than 20 years old to as high as 32 percent for women ages 65 to 74 years old.
- 28 percent of women and 19 percent of men ages 50 and older have diabetes.
- In just 12 years, national health surveys show that diabetes' prevalence for African Americans ages 40 to 74 has doubled from 8.9 percent in 1976-1980 to 18.2 percent in 1988-1994.
- In the 1988-1994 National Health and Nutrition Survey (NHANES III), 11.2 percent of whites ages 40 to 74 years had diabetes compared with 18.2 percent of blacks.

**What is the death rate for diabetes among African Americans?**
- Death rates for people with diabetes are 27 percent higher for blacks compared with whites.
- Diabetes is the fifth leading cause of death for those ages 45 years or older.

***-over-***

**How do diabetes-related complications affect African Americans?**

- African Americans with diabetes are more likely to develop diabetes complications and experience greater disability from the complications than whites.
- The frequency of diabetic retinopathy is 40 to 50 percent higher in African Americans than in white Americans.
- African Americans with diabetes experience kidney failure (also called end-stage renal disease) about four times more often than diabetic white Americans. In 1995, there were 27,258 new cases of kidney failure attributed to diabetes in black Americans.
- African Americans are much more likely to undergo a lower-extremity amputation than white or Hispanic Americans with diabetes. In 1994, there were 13,000 amputations among black people with diabetes, involving 155,000 days in the hospital.

**What can African Americans with diabetes do to prevent these complications?**

- The chances of having diabetes complications can be reduced or delayed significantly by keeping blood sugar levels under control.
- People with diabetes should try to keep their blood sugar level at less than 7 percent as measured by the hemoglobin A1c test. This simple lab test gives the best picture of blood sugar control over a 3-month period and should be done at least twice a year for all people with diabetes.
- People with diabetes can control the disease by eating the right amounts of a variety of foods, getting regular physical activity, taking diabetes medicine as prescribed, and monitoring blood sugar levels.
- For free information about diabetes control, people with diabetes can call 1-800-438-5383 or visit the National Diabetes Education Program's web sites at http://ndep.nih.gov or http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes.

---

*Source: *Diabetes in African Americans Fact Sheet*, National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, NIH Publication No. 98-3266, June 1998.

5/99