

## **Diabetes: Myths and Facts**

Diabetes is a serious disease that affects the body's ability to control the level of sugars in the blood. Many people have diabetes but don't know it.

### **What causes diabetes?**

Diabetes is not caused by eating too much sugar as a child. It is caused when the pancreas (an organ in your body) does not make enough insulin (a hormone) which helps move sugar (or glucose) from the blood into the body's cells. Or your body may not be able to use the insulin it makes as well as it should. Sugar then builds up in the blood. High levels of sugar in the body damages blood vessels and can lead to kidney disease, nerve damage or blindness.

Hispanics/Latinos may develop diabetes at a younger age than other groups. Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans have diabetes as young as 30 years of age. More than 1 in 10 Mexican Americans 20 years or older have diabetes.

### **Taking Insulin is NOT What Makes People Sick**

Some people believe that taking extra insulin, not diabetes, is what makes someone sick. This is not true! When someone with diabetes takes insulin, the body works better because it is getting more of something it makes naturally.

### **People with Diabetes Can Eat the Same Foods as Those Who Don't Have Diabetes**

Most people with diabetes do not have to limit the kinds of sugars and starches they eat, but they do have to limit the total amount.

Since diabetes increases the chance of heart disease, it is important to limit fats and cholesterol.

Eating foods like nopales and corn tortillas are good ways to get fiber, vitamins and minerals but should not be used in place of medications.

### **Diabetes Cannot Be Cured But It Can Be Managed**

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- References:
1. CDC's Diabetes Program "Frequently Asked Questions," <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/faqs.htm>
  2. Denise Cedar, RD, CDE, Salem Hospital Diabetes and Nutrition Education
  3. "Hispanics/Latinos and Diabetes Fact Sheet," National Diabetes Education Program
  4. "La Diabetes Entre los Latinos," The American Diabetes Association. <http://diabetes.org/ada/spanish3.asp>

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