

TEN THINGS EVERY LGBT OLDER ADULT SHOULD KNOW ABOUT DIABETES



Diabetes is a chronic illness that compromises the body's ability to produce and respond to the creation of insulin, the hormone that transforms glucose (sugar) into energy. When too little insulin is produced or the body does not respond to the insulin present, the body is depleted of its main source of energy. With the right diet and healthy lifestyle, people with diabetes can live long and active lives, avoiding the serious health problems that untreated diabetes can create.

About Diabetes

- 1 An estimated 24 million adults and children in the U.S. are currently living with some form of diabetes—and an additional 1.6 million are diagnosed every year.** Diabetes has three main forms—type 1, type 2 and gestational—with type 2 accounting for almost 95 percent of all adult diabetics. People of color and adults 40 and older are at a high risk for developing type 2 diabetes.
- 2 Poor health can increase one's chances for developing diabetes, a reality especially important for LGBT older adults.** The available research shows that LGBT people are more likely to be overweight, smoke, drink, alcohol, and use drugs, which can increase the chances of developing diabetes as well as intensify health complications at its onset. Detecting and treating diabetes as early as possible is key.

- 3 Older people of color are disproportionately impacted by diabetes.** Research shows that communities of color have a diabetes rate 2 to 6 times higher than their white counterparts. Additionally, older people of color are more likely to experience severe diabetic health complications such as blindness, amputation and retina dysfunction.
- 4 Without treatment, diabetes can lead to a variety of severe health problems, including a heightened risk of premature death.** Taking care of yourself means understanding your individual risk factors for developing diabetes, including your hereditary, lifestyle and behavioral factors.

Take Charge of Your Health

- 5 Pay attention to the signs of diabetes.** Unfortunately, the many symptoms of diabetes are often casually ignored or misconstrued as symptoms associated with aging. Common symptoms for diabetes include frequent thirst, urination, hunger and tiredness, as well as spotty vision, irritability and numbness (or decreased sensation) in one's hands and feet.
- 6 Not sure if these symptoms are diabetes-related? Get tested.** Ask your doctor to test your blood glucose levels for diabetes and prediabetes, a condition where blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not elevated enough to be classified as diabetes. Your doctor should also test your blood pressure, body mass index and cholesterol levels to provide you a fuller picture about your risk for developing diabetes.
- 7 Exercise and weight loss can help prevent the onset of diabetes.** Research shows that lifestyle changes, such as losing weight and frequent exercise, can delay or prevent the onset of diabetes. For example, losing 5 to 10 percent of one's weight can decrease the chances of developing diabetes by as much as 58 percent, and getting 30 minutes of light exercise, such as walking, can also help prevent diabetes.

- 8 Make healthy food choices throughout the day and make it a lifestyle change.** Successfully managing diabetes can be as simple as eating a healthy diet, exercising and managing one's blood glucose levels. To help, eat more fiber, fruit, vegetables and whole grain foods, and avoid fried or fatty foods and excessive carbohydrates. Also, opt for water over soda, and plan ahead to keep healthy snacks around, instead of vending machine snacks or fast food. Finally, watch your portion size and choose low-fat dairy options.
- 9 Drink and smoke in moderation, if at all.** Drinking and smoking can exacerbate the complications caused by diabetes. The American Heart Association recommends drinking no more than one drink per day (12 ounces of beer, 4 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of hard alcohol, defined as 80-proof). Additionally, quitting smoking is the best thing you can do for your health. When diabetics smoke, it hinders their ability to regulate blood sugar levels and it places them at a heightened risk for cardiovascular disease, kidney disease and failure, nerve damage and erectile dysfunction.
- 10 Stay upbeat—every day, millions of older adults with diabetes enjoy full and active lives.** Enlist your friends, family and partners in helping you reach your goals. Also, consider joining a support group, or find more information online to help you better understand what living with diabetes might mean for you.

To learn more about the variety of resources and programs that SAGE offers, please call us, or visit us online at sageusa.org.

SAGE COMMUNITY SERVICES

SAGE @ The LGBT Community Center
208 West 13th St., Room 207
New York, NY 10011
212-741-2217

SAGE Harlem Center
2090 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Blvd.
Suite 201, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10027
646-660-8953

KEY SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL READING

National Diabetes Fact Sheet
Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention
www.cdc.gov/diabetes/pubs/pdf/ndfs_2007.pdf

Pre-Diabetes FAQs
American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org/diabetes-basics/prevention/pre-diabetes/pre-diabetes-faqs.html

National Diabetes Information
Clearinghouse
diabetes.niddk.nih.gov

Smoking and Diabetes: Diabetes
Care American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org/diabetes-basics/prevention/checkup-america/smoking.html

Overweight and Obesity
in Sexual-Minority Women:
Evidence from Population-Based Data
Ulrike Boehmer, et al, *American
Journal of Public Health*, 97 (6),
1134-1140.

Type 2 Diabetes in People of Color
Hosey, G, Gordon, S, and Levine A.
(1998), *Nurse Practitioner Forum*,
9 (2), 108-14.

Diabetes—Symptoms, Diagnosis,
and Treatment of Diabetes
The New York Times Health Information
health.nytimes.com/health/guides/disease/diabetes/overview.html

Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE) is the world's largest and oldest organization dedicated to improving the lives of LGBT older adults. SAGE's mission is to lead in addressing issues related to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) aging. In partnership with its constituents and allies, SAGE works to achieve a high quality of life for LGBT older adults, supports and advocates for their rights, fosters a greater understanding of aging in all communities, and promotes positive images of LGBT life in later years.

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