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Americans Earn Failing Grade on Diabetes

It's a disease so common it strikes every 20 seconds, yet Americans earn a failing grade when it comes to basic knowledge about diabetes, according to a recent Harris Interactive survey conducted on behalf of the American Diabetes Association.

The Association has launched a new initiative, "Stop Diabetes," in an effort to better educate the public on the physical, emotional and economic toll of the disease. Americans earned a 51 percent passing grade when asked a series of questions about diabetes, according to the Harris survey. The results showed that several diabetes myths and misconceptions are common and that diabetes remains a misunderstood disease.

Myth: *Diabetes is not a serious disease.* When asked to rank which disease (diabetes, breast cancer, AIDS) was responsible for the greatest number of U.S. deaths each year, not even half the respondents chose diabetes (42 percent).

Fact: Diabetes causes more deaths per year than breast cancer and AIDS combined. Two out of three people with diabetes die from heart disease or stroke.

Myth: *Eating too much sugar can lead to diabetes.* According to the survey, approximately one third of respondents knew this myth was false (32 percent).

Fact: No, it cannot. Type 1 diabetes is caused by genetics and unknown factors that trigger the onset of the disease; type 2 diabetes is caused by genetics and lifestyle factors. Being overweight does increase your risk for developing type 2 diabetes, and a diet high in calories, whether from sugar or from fat, can contribute to weight gain. If you have a history of diabetes in your family, eating a healthy meal plan and exercising regularly are recommended to manage your weight.

Myth: *If you are overweight or obese, you will eventually develop type 2 diabetes.* According to the survey, approximately three in five respondents did not know that this is a false statement. In addition, more than half of respondents did not know that risk for developing type 2 diabetes increases with age.

Fact: Being overweight is a risk factor for developing the disease, but other risk factors such as family history, ethnicity and age also play a role. Unfortunately, too many people disregard the other risk factors for diabetes and think that weight is the only risk factor for type 2 diabetes. Most overweight people never develop type 2 diabetes, and many people with type 2 diabetes are at a normal weight or only moderately overweight.

The Stop Diabetes movement aims to educate people about the seriousness of the disease and to stop its spread bringing those affected by it together to share their stories, raise awareness, and support fundraising efforts.

"We hear stories every day about the tragic toll diabetes takes in every corner of our society," says registered dietician Sue McLaughlin, CDE, president of health care and education for the Association. "Stop Diabetes is a wake up call for the nation. Diabetes kills more people than breast cancer and AIDS combined."

"One in three children born today will develop diabetes if this trend continues," she says. "Rather than let these facts scare us into denial and apathy, all Americans need to take a stand to stop diabetes by learning their risks and how they can prevent or manage this serious disease."

To join the Stop Diabetes movement, visit stopdiabetes.com or call the Association's National Call Center at (800) DIABETES (800-342-2383).

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