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ARE YOU AT RISK FOR DIABETES? LEARN HOW TO PREVENT OR MANAGE THIS DISEASE.

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November’s American Diabetes Month is a good time to assess your risk for developing Type 2 diabetes, and the American Diabetes Association has made it easy with a simple online quiz that you can take. The quiz can be found at diabetes.org/are-you-at-risk/.

In West Virginia, 11.2 percent of the overall population—11.9 percent men and 10.7 percent of women—have been diagnosed with diabetes, according to statistics released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov) in 2013. That’s higher than the overall rate of 9.4 percent for the United States.

What’s more, according to the CDC, not only have 23.1 million Americans been diagnosed with diabetes, but it is also estimated that 7.2 million, or 23.8 percent of the population, has diabetes but has not been diagnosed.

A diagnosis can lead to healthier eating and exercise habits and medications that can manage the symptoms of diabetes, which can include urinating often, feeling very thirsty and/or very hungry even though you are eating, extreme fatigue, blurry vision, cuts and bruises that are slow to heal, tingling pain or numbness in the hands and/or feet.

Another symptom that is associated specifically with Type 1 diabetes, which is usually diagnosed in children and young adults when the body does not produce enough insulin, is weight loss, even if the person is eating more than usual.

Even if you don’t have diabetes, consider your habits and whether you might benefit from eating healthier, losing weight and increasing your level of physical activity. Quitting smoking also will reduce the chance of getting heart disease or having a stroke. Those steps, along with managing high cholesterol or high blood pressure, can help prevent diabetes.
Other factors that can predispose someone to the disease include family history and gender. If a parent or sibling has heart disease or diabetes, an individual has a higher risk of getting the disease. Men are more prone to heart disease, which also puts them at a higher risk, but once women reach menopause, their chances of getting diabetes also increase.

As we age, the possibility for developing diabetes, heart disease or having a stroke also goes up. People of certain ethnicities also are more at risk. They include African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, American Indians and Alaska natives, according to the CDC. Some Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans are also at higher risk.

The Monongalia County Health Department offers a diabetes clinic from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Fridays. It is led by Kendra L. Barker, who has a Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP). She also is a Certified Diabetes Educator (CDE) and is board certified in Advanced Diabetes Management (ADM).

Patients can self-refer or be referred by a physician to attend the clinic. They can use insurance, or there is an income-based sliding scale for patients without insurance, Barker said. During the first appointment, Barker assesses the patient, doing bloodwork or ordering tests that can help determine a patient’s glucose levels. Less than 100 is good, 100 to 126 is pre-diabetes, and greater than 126 is diabetes, according to the American Diabetes Association (ADA).

Also, Barker said, an A1C test, which measures the average of glucose levels over a three-month period, can help determine if a patient needs medication and also what kind. In addition to helping with medication, Barker counselors patients on meal planning and diet, including how to limit carbohydrates, which break down as sugar in the body, as well as exercise. For instance, one patient who has arthritis learned that he could do water aerobics, which didn’t bother his knees like regular exercise did.

Barker also noted that exercise doesn’t necessarily mean going to the gym. “It can be brisk walking,” she said. “It doesn’t have to be running a mile and lifting weights. The ADA recommends 150 minutes of exercise a week, which breaks down to about 22 minutes a day. Other tactics for getting exercise can include parking farther away from a destination than you normally would, taking the stairs instead of the elevator or playing with children.

To learn more about diabetes, check out diabetes.org. And to make an appointment to see Barker at the Monongalia County Health Department’s Diabetes Clinic, call 304-598-5119.

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