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Americans Struggle with Diabetes

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Orson Welles said, "My doctors told me to stop having intimate dinners for four. Unless there are three other people." It's sad that Americans are potentially eating for four people; and now, childhood obesity is commonplace and a disease that was predominately found in older adults is now being found in children—diabetes. But it's no wonder some grade schoolers are struggling with obesity and adult diseases like type 2 diabetes. Diets that consist of McDonald's hamburgers and Dairy Queen milkshakes, coupled with hours of videogames and TV doesn't exactly equate to healthy blood glucose levels and lean body mass. "The inexpensive ingredients that are found primarily in processed, fried and packaged foods are damaging to all systems in the body, and especially ones that control blood sugar and blood lipids," said Brad West, N.D., research advisor for Nordic Naturals. "When these foods are consumed on a regular basis, dysregulation of these systems arises and conditions like obesity, type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol and triglycerides are the result." It's almost humorous to ask why diabetes is on the rise; isn't it obvious?

"It's simple—we're getting bigger," said Matt Schueller, senior vice president of marketing, Enzymatic Therapy. "Our lives are much more sedentary than they were even 30 years ago. On top of that, our diets

have suffered as well. Fast food restaurants, huge portions, processed foods and less time to plan and prepare healthy meals all contribute to our weight problem."

Stephen Holt, M.D., Ph.D., DSc, LLD, scientific advisor, Natures Benefit Inc. and Holt Institute of Medicine, agreed: "The strongest explanation links weight gain and obesity with type 2 diabetes. This forms the concept of 'diabesity.' Other factors that may make a major contribution include environmental toxicity with change of fat metabolism; and several lifestyle factors including lack of exercise and poor nutrition characterized by excessive consumption of simple sugars or carbohydrates in processed food."

As Americans, we are definitely testing the limits of our stomachs, and our immune systems, by eating diets full of sugar, empty carbohydrates and saturated fats. "In 1990, Americans consumed five pounds of sugar per year," said **Graeme Shaw, M.D., health consultant for Get Well Natural LLC.** "That number has now increased to 135 pounds per year. Unfortunately, most Americans don't live an active enough life to expel all the extra sugar they bring into their bodies."

"If you look at sales figures of fast food and sodas you can see we have a long way to go in terms of education," said Ken Whitman, president of Peter Gillham's Natural Vitality.

According to the American Diabetes Association, 23.6 million children and adults in the United States, or 7.8 percent of the population, have diabetes. While an estimated 17.9 million have been diagnosed with diabetes, unfortunately, 5.7 million people (or nearly one-quarter) are unaware they have the disease. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) reported 90 to 95 percent of diabetics have type 2 diabetes. To break it down, diabetes is a disease in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin. Insulin is a hormone needed to convert sugar, starches and other food into energy for daily life. In a non-diabetic, glucose (sugar) is absorbed in the bloodstream and insulin from the pancreas transports the glucose into the cells which, in turn, provides energy; any excess glucose is then stored in the liver. In diabetics, the glucose enters the bloodstream and insulin leaves the pancreas to transport the glucose into the cells. Unfortunately, one of two things happens next: either the pancreas doesn't produce enough insulin to transport the glucose (type 1 diabetes and type 2 diabetes) or the cells become resistant to the insulin (type 2 diabetes) stifling the normal process leaving energy levels low, among other things. Type 2 diabetes increases the risk for heart disease, blindness, nerve damage and kidney damage.