

CDC: Diabetes, Obesity Becoming Epidemic

Diabetes in the United States rose by about 6 percent in 1999 in what the government called dramatic evidence of an unfolding epidemic.

Cases rose sharply across almost every demographic category, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said. The rise is blamed largely on obesity, which was up a startling 57 percent from 1991.

“The message is out there _ lose weight by increasing your physical activity and changing your diet,” CDC epidemiologist Ali Mokdar said. “But nobody is doing it.”

The share of the adult population diagnosed with diabetes jumped from about 6.5 percent in 1998 to 6.9 percent in 1999, the CDC said. The obesity rate increased to nearly one in five Americans _ up from just 12 percent in 1991.

The rise in diabetes crossed age groups but was sharpest among people ages 30 to 39. The CDC reported an especially large rise in 1999 among blacks _ more than 10 percent in just one year.

CDC director Jeffrey Koplan said the effect on the nation's health-care costs will be overwhelming if the trends continue. “This dramatic new evidence signals the unfolding of an epidemic in the United States,” he said.

The statistics, released Friday by the CDC, appear in the February issue of the journal *Diabetes Care*. The report is based on a telephone survey of 150,000 Americans.

At least 16 million Americans have diabetes, which prevents the body from regulating blood sugar. The number is expected to rise to 22 million by 2025.

Diabetes is a leading cause of blindness, kidney failure and amputations; it dramatically raises the risk of heart attacks.

Experts have blamed America's inactive culture for the obesity that leads to diabetes. Computer-centered lifestyles, easy fast food and disappearing space for outdoor exercise all have been cited.

In many cases, Mokdar said, Americans who do exercise don't do it often enough, and many cut fat from their diets without paying attention to crucial calories.

“This used to be a disease that came late in life,” he said. “Now it's coming in kids as young as the early 20s. That's alarming.”