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Type 2 Diabetes: A Major Health Threat

We are conditioned from an early age to know that regular exercise and eating a nutritious, balanced diet is essential to good health. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is one of the easiest ways to avoid potentially life-threatening conditions such as diabetes or heart disease, and yet the number of people afflicted with both ailments is rising at an incredible rate — and it's not just those with the diseases who are paying for it.

One cause for concern is the rise of diabetes — especially among the young. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, diabetes is “a group of diseases marked by high levels of blood glucose resulting from defects in insulin production, insulin action, or both.” Diabetes can cause serious complications and even death. As of 2007, nearly 24 million Americans, or 7.8 percent of the population, have diabetes (all types) and based on 2006 data, 326,138 Missouri adults (18 and older) reported they have diabetes. Fifty-seven million Americans have pre-diabetes.

There are three major types of diabetes, but the most common is type 2, which accounts for 90 to 95 percent of all diagnosed cases of diabetes among adults. Type 2 diabetes is often linked to older age, obesity, family history of the disease, and physical inactivity. A troubling trend is that more and more children are being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, which is linked to an increase in overweight children. According to statistics from the National Diabetes Education Program, the percentage of children with newly diagnosed diabetes classified as type 2 has increased from less than 5 percent before 1994 to 30 to 50 percent in the following years. Without a major lifestyle change for many of us, type 2 diabetes is likely to be the next big health threat to the nation and to Missouri — and the economic impact cannot be denied.

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services estimates that based on 2006 data, direct medical costs for Missouri adults with diabetes is approximately \$2.72 billion per year. The estimated national economic cost in 2007 was \$174 billion, with \$116 billion in direct costs (medical bills) and \$58 billion in indirect costs (loss of productivity). People diagnosed with diabetes on average have medical expenses that are nearly 2.3 times higher than the average person. Approximately one of every five health care dollars in the U.S. is spent caring for someone with diabetes, while it's estimated that one of every 10 health care dollars is attributed to the disease. It's clear that as a state and country we are paying for a disease that is often preventable.

A 2007 study at the University of Missouri-Columbia found that exercising for as little as 15 minutes a day can actually help prevent and fight type 2 diabetes. Sure, regular exercise takes time and commitment when it seems Americans are busier than ever. We work long hours. Technology can keep us in constant contact with the office. Even our free time is overscheduled. And sometimes it's just not convenient to exercise or take the time to prepare a healthy meal for your family. But by maintaining a healthy weight, exercising and eating properly, you are taking big steps toward lifelong health and the prevention of type 2 diabetes — and setting an excellent example for your children.

As a member of the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Health, I'm aware of our state's health struggles, but measures are being taken to educate Missouri families about the importance of

exercise and a healthy diet. There are various opportunities to be physically active across the state, from neighborhood walking trails to the Show-Me State Games. Taking part and being active will greatly improve your quality of life and reduce your risk for type 2 diabetes. Visit the American Diabetes Association's Web site and use their Diabetes Personal Health Decisions tool to calculate your risk at <https://www.diabetes.org/phd/profile/default.jsp>.

If you have any comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.

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