Can Thin People Get Type 2 Diabetes?

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Can a Thin Person Get Type 2 Diabetes?

Most people tend to think of diabetes as a disease of overweight sugar addicts, but that's a dangerously misleading assumption.

In reality, there is a surprising number of people who are not overtly overweight but are what's known as metabolically obese – showing signs of insulin resistance and hypertriglyceridemia (high level of fat in the blood). This puts the body at risk for type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease.

In fact, many people develop type 2 diabetes without fitting the typical description, and that can have terrible consequences for the thinner diabetic.

Diabetes Complications in Thinner People

Although experts agree that carrying too much extra weight will increase your risk of developing diabetes, there is a bit of a paradox among those who already have diabetes: thinner diabetics tend to have more severe complications.

Research shows that diabetics in a normal weight range are twice as likely to die from a heart attack or stroke as those patients who are overweight or obese (according to their body mass index, or BMI), and they're also at greater risk for other serious disorders.

It's unclear why diabetics with bigger BMIs seem to live longer and with fewer complications, but the evidence suggests that there's more at play than the number on the scale when it comes to diabetes. Muscle mass, body measurements, and fitness level all factor into your disease risk and your chances of suffering from a fatal coronary event.

Factors that May Lead to Insulin Resistance

Since weight is clearly not the only issue, it's important to determine what other factors might be putting you at risk for type 2 diabetes.

Although obesity may not explain everything, recent research suggests that a few aspects *related* to weight gain could be contributing to the surge in metabolic obesity among people who maintain a normal weight:

Waist Circumference

One study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that people who were overweight but had relatively small waistlines were in less danger of premature death than normal-weight people with relatively big bellies.

How do you know if your waist measurement is big enough to put you at risk? One straightforward approach is to convert your height to inches, and divide the number by two – that's your maximum waist circumference limit.

Factors that May Lead to Insulin Resistance

Inactivity

Not only does a sedentary lifestyle lead to a flabby body, it can also drive your chances of developing diabetes way up, regardless of how much weight you put on.

In a recent University of Missouri study that focused on people who stopped or drastically lowered their level of activity, doctors found that the body responded almost immediately with higher blood sugar spikes right after a meal.

It appears that inactivity disrupts your body's glycemic control, and those volatile blood sugar levels can lead straight to diabetes.

Low Cardiorespiratory Fitness

VO2max is a measurement of how much oxygen your body can absorb and use when exercising – that is, your exercise capacity. It turns out that a low VO2max is an early marker for insulin resistance, with one study finding that people at risk for diabetes had on average 15% less VO2max than others.

This points to a connection between cardio fitness and your risk for developing diabetes (or worsening your condition), and weight is not an accurate measure for fitness.

One other theory surrounding diabetes among people with normal weight is the personal fat threshold: some experts believe that each person has an invisible limit to how much fat their bodies can store without feeling adverse effects, and that explains why non-overweight diabetics respond to weight loss treatment just as well as overweight diabetics. It can be difficult to know where on the scale your particular threshold lies, but taking steps to decrease your body fat percentage could bring your glucose tolerance back to normal.

The Good News for Thinner Diabetics

They may have more potential health problems to watch out for, but thinner people with insulin resistance (or those at risk for diabetes) could also have an easier time reversing their dangerous metabolic issues.

After all, they do not have to deal with obesity and all its consequences, which puts them one step ahead on the road to a healthier life.

Inactivity and low fitness (VO2max levels) are risk factors that you can change, and if you're already carrying less weight, starting a fitness routine will be far more comfortable than if you were overweight.

As for abdominal fat, there are ways to reduce your existing waist measurement and keep it down, namely with an overhaul to your daily diet. Refined carbs and fructose both encourage visceral fat accumulation, but alcohol also stimulates your body to store fat around your middle.

In turn, the first step towards a slimmer midsection and a lower diabetes risk is a lean-protein, whole food diet – which should really come as no surprise.