

PARADE

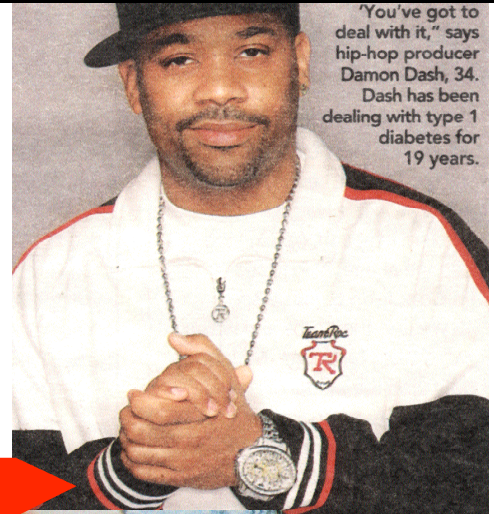
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2005

HEALTH ON PARADE®

Despite spectacular advances in treatment, the disease is still on the rise – an epidemic in the making.

Will Diabetes Touch You?

By Dianne Hales



"You've got to deal with it," says hip-hop producer Damon Dash, 34. Dash has been dealing with type 1 diabetes for 19 years.

MY PARENTS were Holocaust survivors, yet they couldn't muster the courage to tell me that I had diabetes," recalls Howard Steinberg, 47, of Westport, Conn. Stricken at 10, Steinberg says the disease "changed how I lived every hour of every day for the rest of my life. I did not tell my friends at school. I did not tell the girl I fell in love with for a long time. In corporate America, I kept my diabetes hidden for years because I did not want to be seen as 'damaged.'"

It took more than 30 years for Steinberg to transform his "shameful" secret into a rallying cry. He did so by creating an interactive Website and a cable TV show that encourage diabetics to live their best life by getting the best care. "The only way we'll win the war on diabetes," he says, "is by becoming engaged patients who take charge of our health."

The stakes have never been higher. More than 18 million Americans have

Why You Should Worry

New cases of diabetes have risen 52% among ages 18 to 79. The disease is also spiking in children – with obesity and lack of physical activity fueling the crisis.

People with diabetes have a 2-to 4-fold increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

Health-care costs for a diabetic are five times higher than the average person's (\$13,243 a year compared to \$2,560). If you develop diabetes, it may be difficult – or impossible – to get or keep health insurance and life insurance. To learn more, visit www.diabetes.org/healthinsurance on the Web.

Every 3 minutes, someone dies from diabetes or its complications.



Maria Perez, 65, of Hockessin, Del., was casual about managing her type 2 diabetes until it affected her eyes. Now, she adheres to her regimen, which includes two insulin injections a day.

Diabetes can cut your life by 10 to 15 years. But with today's treatments, you can win those years back.

diabetes, which means that the pancreas does not produce or properly use insulin, a metabolism-regulating hormone. Some 41 million more have pre-diabetes—higher-than-healthy glucose (blood sugar) levels that endanger the heart, blood vessels, eyes, nerves and kidneys, just like full-blown diabetes.

Diabetes and its complications kill more Americans each year than AIDS and breast cancer combined, and cost the U.S. \$132 billion annually. "We're seeing an epidemic of diabetes in younger and younger people," says Dr. C. Ronald Kahn, president of the Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston. "Unless we reverse this trend, in 15 to 20 years there will be an epidemic of people being disabled by diabetic complications."

Know The Facts

There are different types of diabetes, but all damage the body in the same ways.

Pre-diabetics. Fasting blood sugars that are above normal but not high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. This "borderline" stage is also called Impaired Glucose Tolerance (IGT).

Type 1 diabetes. An autoimmune disease that usually appears in childhood but can occur at any age. Patients must take insulin by injection or pump to stay alive.

Type 2 diabetes. A metabolic disorder in which the pancreas does not make enough insulin or use it efficiently. One-third of the children born in 2000 will develop this formerly "adult disease" during their lifetime.

Despite such grim statistics, good blood-sugar control can prevent or delay much of the damage. "Diabetes can shorten your life span by 10 to 15 years," says Dr. Anne Peters, a specialist in Los Angeles and author of *Conquering Diabetes*, "But with today's treatments, you can win those years back."

Taking charge is key. Maria Perez, 65, of Hockessin, Del., has had type 2 diabetes for 25 years and takes insulin twice daily. Sometimes I eat things I know I shouldn't, and I don't always check my blood sugar every day," she says. "But I'm going to have to be more careful, because I'm having problems with my eyes."

Like Perez, two thirds of people with type 2 diabetes do not keep their blood sugars in a safe range, increasing their likelihood of developing serious complications. Daily blood-sugar checks are important," says Dr. Paul Jellinger, past president of the American College of Endocrinology, "but all diabetics also need to know their hemoglobin A1C levels. Every one-point reduction in this blood test, which reflects glucose control over the preceding 3 months, cuts the risk of damage to one's eyes, kidneys and nerves by 30% to 40%.

New treatments, new hope. Among the latest breakthroughs is a continuous

glucose monitor, inserted into the skin, that takes the guesswork out of diabetes management by measuring blood sugar every few minutes and alerting patients to dangerous highs and lows—a potentially life-saving feature. For type 2 diabetics, the injectable drug Byetta (exenatide) mimics a hormone that slows the emptying of the stomach. ("People with diabetes are very often hungry, and this provides a normal feeling of fullness, so they eat less and lose weight," explains Dr. Peters.) The

oral drug Actos, which lowers glucose, has been found to reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes in type 2 diabetics. And the most eagerly awaited advance—an inhalable insulin powder—may become available next year, eliminating or reducing the need for injections.

In the not too distant future, therapies still in their infancy may reverse diabetes. In the U.S. and Europe, infusing monoclonal antibodies into type 1 diabetics blocked the destruction of the pancreas' insulin-producing islet cells for 18 months. "This is the first step to finding a way to halt the progression of type 1 diabetes," says Dr. Robert Goldstein, the chief scientific officer of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. No one knows yet if this therapy can prevent diabetes entirely in high-risk individuals.

Worldwide, more than 500 people with severe diabetes have received transplants of islet cells. In some cases, they needed no insulin for a year. "Islet-cell transplantation can help certain patients, and we are working hard to make it available to more," says Dr. Camillo Ricordi of the Diabetes Research Institute at the University of

Miami. Researchers also are working to reengineer other body cells to produce insulin and to convert stem cells into islet cells.

Hour by hour, day after day. The critical factor in diabetes management is not a drug or a diet; it's the patient. "Think of cruise control: You still have to drive the car and decide if you need to go faster or slower," says Carolyn Robertson, a certified diabetes educator at the New York Diabetes Program in Manhattan. "The tools are only as good as the patient."

"Diabetes is a 24-hour disease," says Damon Dash, a hip-hop producer and fashion design who, at 15, dropped 20 pounds and felt so weak that he thought he was dying. The cause: type 1 diabetes.

"I'm healthier than I would have been without diabetes," says Dash, who is now 34. "It kept me from going over the edge—from eating too much, drinking too much, partying too much. You've got to deal with diabetes, or you could go blind, lose a leg, die a horrible death. As a diabetic, you can still do everything you want to in life. You just have to educate yourself properly and do whatever it takes to keep yourself healthy."

Change Your Lifestyle

Family history, age, excess weight, physical inactivity and high blood pressure put you at risk. To delay or prevent pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes, the American Diabetes Association recommends:

Walk or engage in some other moderate exercise for 30 minutes at least 5 days a week.

Eat a healthy diet built around low-fat, low-calorie foods.

Get routine screenings (such as a fasting plasma glucose or a 2-hour oral glucose tolerance test) before age 45 if you have any risk factors. Regardless of risk, get screened routinely beginning at 45).



For more on diabetes, including news on the latest treatments and how to prevent complications, visit www.parade.com on the web.