



By Dr. Ivonne Draughton, DNP, NP-C

**T**he incidence of diabetes and hypertension (high blood pressure) has risen sharply in recent years. Diabetes is currently the country's seventh leading cause of death; furthermore, the CDC estimates that 29 million people (9.7 percent of the population) have the disease today and 33 percent of American adults had signs of prediabetes in 2015. Similarly, one-third of American adults (70 million people) have high blood pressure, and only half of these people have their condition under control. Hypertension costs the nation \$46 billion each year due to medical expenses and missed workdays.

**CAN WE PREVENT DIABETES AND WORK TOWARDS A CURE?**

Yes, we can; Type-2 diabetes can be prevented. Preventive steps can include eating more healthfully, losing weight, and exercising. It's especially important to take such measures if you're overweight or have family members with the disease. It's never too late to start.

**MYTH:**

***Diabetes and high blood pressure run in my family, so I know I will get it.***

While your genes play a role in your health, environmental and behavioral factors are more important. Smoking, lack of exercise, mental stress, and high consumption of sodium, alcohol, and unsaturated fat can all increase your likelihood of developing these two diseases. In fact, they share common causes: obesity, inflammation, oxidative stress, insulin resistance, and mental stress. All these factors can be addressed through lifestyle changes.

# Shifts in Medical Knowledge *and Medical Myths Debunked*

**MYTH:**

***I have diabetes and high blood pressure, so now I am doomed.***

While it's true that hypertension and diabetes can cause cardiovascular or heart disease and the resulting complications, such as heart attacks and strokes, you can avoid these issues by reducing your blood pressure and managing your diabetes.

**MYTH:**

***I'm so overweight, the damage is already done.***

It's never too late to lose weight. Blood pressure and fat levels increase along with your weight, so weight loss is one of the most effective ways of controlling hypertension and diabetes. Losing just ten percent of your body weight can reduce your systolic pressure by ten points.

**MYTH:**

***Exercising regularly is easier said than done, especially if you have kids.***

Having children provides a powerful reason to be more active: you'd set a good example for your kids! Children learn from what they see, so they will be more likely to be active if their parents are.

One way to become more active is to become an early bird: willpower declines throughout the day, so you might be less likely to go to the gym at night. That's why some people work out in the morning, when their motivation is at its maximum.

Regular physical activity (30 minutes six or seven days per week) can lower your blood pressure, reduce stress, reduce your blood sugar, and produce endorphins that make you feel better and look great. Exercise can involve walking, jogging, cycling, swimming, or a strength and endurance program like Crossfit. More on this in a minute.

**MYTH:**

***My family won't like it if I change the way we eat.***

Exchanging processed and fast foods for real, fresh, natural ingredients will only improve your family's lives, too. Developing a diet rich in lean meats, fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, and whole grains can be a more nutritious, flavorful, and satisfying enterprise for everyone in your life. It isn't always easy to change your eating habits, so try these tips:

***Keep a food diary.*** Recording what you eat, even for just a week, can shed light on your true eating habits. Monitor what you eat, how much, when, and why.

***Be a smart shopper.*** Buy groceries on the weekend and prepare your meals for the week! This saves time and money. Let your kids help you: it's fun and involves everyone in the "new you."

**MYTH:**

***I am too out of shape to do high-intensity workouts like Crossfit.***

During your first visit to the box (what crossfitters call the gym), the trainer will scale the workouts to your fitness level. Most Crossfit gyms will make you feel part of their family immediately. It is by nature an inclusive, not exclusive, sport. Try it! Once you do, you'll be hooked, I guarantee it. It happened to me! **h&h**

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