# Desert Diabetes Alert Program

## REACHING OUT TO PREVENT DIABETES

*By: Elke Jost-Vu, MD Medical Director, Diabetes Program Eisenhower Medical Center*

Priscilla Blancarte (left), Medical Assistant, Eisenhower Desert Diabetes Alert Program, screens for diabetes at pharmacies, supermarkets and health fairs throughout our community.

Type 2 diabetes can be prevented. The Diabetes Prevention Program – a major, 27-center clinical trial, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health – studied more than 3,200 people, ages 25 through 85, and concluded that lifestyle changes in diet and exercise can prevent Type 2 diabetes. Sixty percent of the participants, who lost five to 10 percent of their body weight, exercised regularly and ate healthy food, did not develop Type 2 diabetes.

Based on the success of the Diabetes Prevention Program trial, Eisenhower Medical Center created an outreach program for the Coachella Valley to identify people who are at-risk for diabetes and to enroll them in an educational program for lifestyle changes. In June 2003, Eisenhower Medical Center received a diabetes prevention grant from the Desert Healthcare District. Highly successful, the Eisenhower diabetes prevention program maintained a 98 percent retention rate, and the Desert Healthcare District extended the grant through 2006.

Diabetes is an insidious disease. Diabetes is the number one cause of kidney failure, limb amputation and blindness. Diabetes is also a major cause of heart disease and stroke.

Type 2 diabetes is most prevalent over the age of 45. Currently, 18 percent of all men and women over the age of 65 have diabetes. Type 2 diabetes is even more common in Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians and Pacific Islanders. Once rare in adolescents, the dramatic increase in obesity among American teens exposes them to diabetes at an early age.

Who is at-risk for diabetes? The strongest risk factor is family history, followed by obesity, hypertension, an abnormal lipid pattern (high triglycerides and low HDL cholesterol), and a fasting blood sugar between 100 mg/dl and 126 mg/dl. It is estimated that there are about 30 to 40 million people in this country who are at-risk for diabetes, and about 30,000 people who are at-risk in the Coachella Valley.

Desert Diabetes Alert Program Eisenhower's Desert Diabetes Alert Program reaches out to the community with screenings, lab tests and comprehensive education.To date, Eisenhower Medical Center has screened more than 5,500 people, of which approximately 25 percent were identified as at-risk, and 12 percent were found to have diabetes.

Screeners are present at pharmacies, supermarkets and health fairs. Individuals who have a family history of diabetes, are overweight or have high blood pressure, simply fill out a questionnaire, the responses to which may qualify them for a blood test. Program participants are taught healthy eating habits, and how to lose weight and exercise – all at no cost.

Because of the increasing number of teens who are at-risk for diabetes, the Palm Springs Unified School District and Desert Sands Unified School District allow Eisenhower's Desert Diabetes Alert Program to screen teenagers (ages 12 to 18) in the high schools. To date, Eisenhower has screened more than 1,400 students, finding 33 percent at-risk for diabetes. More than 340 students and adults, who were identified as at-high risk for diabetes, are enrolled in the two-year, lifestyle intervention, educational program. Impressively, the Eisenhower Desert Diabetes Alert Program's twoyear lifestyle education classes have a 95 percent retention rate with students. If you feel that you are at-risk for diabetes, call Eisenhower's Desert Diabetes Alert Program at 760-674-3689.

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