

Today, 14 November, is World Diabetes Day. The theme for this year's campaign is "Women and diabetes – our right to a healthy future". The campaign aims to promote the importance of affordable and equitable access for all women at risk of or living with diabetes to the essential diabetes medicines and technologies, self-management education and information they require to achieve optimal diabetes outcomes and to prevent type 2 diabetes.

Diabetes is a menacing pandemic as it remains hidden throughout most of the world – with up to half of all people with diabetes globally remaining undiagnosed. Diabetes kills more than 1.5 million people every year worldwide and is expected to be the seventh leading cause of death by 2030. More than 80% of deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. However, up to 70% of cases of type 2 diabetes could be prevented through the adoption of a healthy lifestyle.

Globally, there are currently over 205 million women living with diabetes. Two out of every five women with diabetes are of reproductive age, accounting for over 60 million women worldwide.

The Eastern Mediterranean Region has the highest prevalence of diabetes in the world – 43 million people in the Region have diabetes, and 12% of women in the Region have diabetes, the highest percentage of all WHO regions.

Alarmingly, women with type 2 diabetes are almost 10 times more likely to have coronary heart disease than women without the condition and women with type 1 diabetes have an increased risk of early miscarriage or having a baby with malformations.

On this year's World Diabetes Day, WHO and partners are highlighting the fact that all women with diabetes require affordable and equitable access to care and education to better manage their diabetes and improve their health outcomes.

WHO and partners call on governments and health sectors to pay adequate attention to the specific needs and priorities of women, to provide all women with diabetes with access to the essential diabetes medicines and technologies, self-management education and information they need to achieve optimal diabetes outcomes and access to pre-conception planning services to reduce risk during pregnancy.

Women and girls are key agents in the adoption of healthy lifestyles to improve their health and the health and well-being of future generations. They have important roles to play to avoid diabetes or alleviate its effects, including practising physical activity and proper healthy diets to improve their health outcomes.

Supporting facts

- 70% of premature deaths among adults are largely due to behaviour initiated during adolescence.
- Women, as mothers, have a huge influence over the long-term health status of their children.
- Research has shown that when mothers are granted greater control over resources, they allocate more to food, children's health and nutrition, and education.
- Women are the gatekeepers of household nutrition and lifestyle habits and therefore have the potential to drive prevention from the household and beyond.

What needs to be done

- Women and girls should be empowered with easy and equitable access to knowledge and resources to strengthen their capacity to prevent type 2 diabetes in their families and better safeguard their own health.
- Promoting opportunities for physical exercise in adolescent girls, particularly in developing countries, must be a priority for diabetes prevention.

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