



# Diabetes Screening and Diagnosis for Asian Americans

**D**iabetes is one of the leading causes of death in the United States, yet approximately 5.4 million people do not realize they have the disease.

This gap in public knowledge is due to the fact that diabetes symptoms can often go unnoticed for long periods of time, and because there has been little national focus placed on diabetes, compared to other life-threatening chronic diseases.

Proper screening and early diagnosis of diabetes are necessary to avoid serious complications such as heart disease, kidney disease, and eye problems.

Diabetes is diagnosed through one of several blood tests given by a doctor. These tests, including the fasting plasma glucose test (FPG) and the oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT), measure the levels of glucose (sugar) in the blood. FPG results of 126 mg/dl or OGTT results of 200 mg/dl indicate a person has diabetes.<sup>2</sup>

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) recommends routine screening every three years for all people age 45 and over. For individuals at high risk for developing diabetes, such as Asian Americans, the ADA recommends earlier and more frequent testing. In particular, Asian Americans who are obese or have a family history of diabetes should get screened for the disease.

### **Barriers to Care and Education**

Asian Americans face numerous challenges that may make access to basic health information and care, such as physical exams and screenings, difficult and costly.

Over 15% of Asian American and Pacific Islander women and 17% of Asian American and Pacific Islander men lack health insurance, an important key to preventive health care.<sup>3</sup>

### **Barriers to Diabetes Care for Asian Americans**

*Lack of health insurance*

*Lack of culturally  
appropriate diabetes  
education materials*

*Lack of culturally  
competent health care  
providers*

*Low utilization of  
preventive health care*

In addition, the health care system has yet to address barriers posed by the diversity of the Asian American population, two-thirds of which are immigrants. Currently, there are not enough linguistically and culturally appropriate materials and services to help Asian Americans learn about diabetes.

With increased diabetes outreach efforts and improved cultural competency among health care providers, more Asian Americans will get screened for diabetes and learn disease prevention strategies that will ensure healthy, active lives.

### **Risk Factors for Asian Americans<sup>1</sup>**

*Obesity*

*Family history of  
diabetes*

*Delivery of a baby  
weighing more than 9  
pounds, or previous  
diagnosis  
of gestational diabetes*

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from American Diabetes Association, "Report of the Expert Committee on the Diagnosis and Classification of Diabetes Mellitus," *Diabetes Care*, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> CDC, *Chronic Disease in Minority Populations*, Atlanta: CDC, 1992.