

Worry 'ups men's diabetes risk'

Anxiety, depression and sleepless nights increase the risk of diabetes in men, a Swedish study suggests. Researchers found men with high levels of "psychological distress" had more than double the risk of developing type 2 diabetes than those with low levels. The study, which looked at 2,127 men born between 1938 and 1957 and 3,100 women, found no such link in women.

Writing in *Diabetic Medicine*, the researchers said stress may affect the way the brain regulates hormones. In the UK, there are currently 2.3 million people diagnosed with diabetes and an estimated 500,000 people who have not yet been diagnosed.

The men, who had normal blood glucose levels, were questioned for signs of psychological distress, including anxiety, insomnia, depression, apathy and fatigue. Between eight to 10 years later the men were tested for diabetes. The men with the highest levels of psychological distress were 2.2 times more likely to develop the condition than those with the lowest levels.

Further analysis showed the link was independent of other factors including age, body mass index, family history of diabetes, smoking, physical activity and socio-economic background. In the women assessed in the same study, there was no increased risk of diabetes in those with high levels of psychological distress.

Coping strategies

Study leader Professor Anders Ekblom, from the Karolinska Institute, Sweden, said it was already known that stress and depression were risk factors for heart disease and it had been suspected they may also play a role in diabetes. "The link could be a result of the way psychological distress affects the brain's role in regulating hormones or perhaps because depression influences a person's diet and level of physical activity in a negative way." He added that men and women tended to have different coping strategies, which may explain the difference in risk. "While women communicate symptoms of distress and depression, men are more unwilling to admit such feelings and tend to cope through drinking, drug use and other private activities or actions."

Dr Iain Frame, director of research at Diabetes UK, said: "It is intriguing that the increased risk of diabetes occurs in men only and it would be interesting to find out why. "The results suggest that it could be due to a hormonal or behavioural influence. "We already know from previous studies that stress is considered to be a risk factor for type 2 diabetes and others have looked at the link between sleep disorders, such as insomnia, and the condition. "This research appears to confirm that there might be something in this."

In a separate study, a team at the University of Newcastle found that walking for 45 minutes a day can help control diabetes.

Those in the study became better at burning fat, which in turn helped them to regulate their blood sugar levels.

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