

Lifestyle changes key to diabetes prevention

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EU-funded researchers and clinicians have gone head to head with diabetes and it looks as though they are winning the fight. The partners of the IMAGE ('Development and implementation of a European guideline and training standards for diabetes prevention') project have developed the first-ever pan-European strategy for the prevention of this

disease which refuses to step out of the limelight. IMAGE received EUR 700,000 in support from the European Commission's Directorate General (DG) for Health and Consumer Protection.

Experts predict that the number of diabetes cases will rise from 53.2 million to 64.1 million within the next 15 years, a jump of more than 20%. Just as worrying is the fact that 10% of the population aged between 20 and 79 will suffer from diabetes by 2030. Diabetes is no longer an older person's disease; teenagers and young children are also affected. Reflecting growing concern about the impacts of spiralling diabetes rates, the EU is determined to take action by implementing prevention programmes for type 2 diabetes.

While many prevention models have been tabled, they have fallen short of the mark. Here is where IMAGE enters the picture. With all eyes glued on the target of improving Europe's ability to prevent type 2 diabetes, the IMAGE partners offer a set of evidence-based recommendations on how to stop type 2 diabetes escalating any further.

Some of the recommendations include changing patients' diets and increasing their physical activity to prevent type 2 diabetes, and defining and identifying people who

are at greater risk of being diagnosed with the disease. According to the team, recent evidence shows that even a 5% weight loss and 150 minutes of moderate activity each week can cut someone's risk of developing diabetes. Just as incredible is the revelation that the rate of progression to type 2 diabetes was 0% in people who successfully made four out of five lifestyle changes.

The IMAGE partners presented their final recommendations at the Sixth World Congress on Prevention of Diabetes and its Complications in Dresden, Germany, on 9 April. The IMAGE consortium, which is headed by the Dresden University of Technology, consists of diverse specialists, such as public health and policy experts, health researchers, behavioural scientists, epidemiologists and general practitioners (GPs), from 20 European countries.

'Prevention using lifestyle modifications in high-risk individuals is cost-effective and should be embedded in evaluated models of care,' the IMAGE guideline reads. 'Effective prevention plans are predicted upon sustained government initiatives comprising advocacy, community support, fiscal and legislative changes, private sector engagement and continuous media communication.'

IMAGE also provides a practical guide on how to set up diabetes prevention programmes that work. Entitled 'Take Action to Prevent Diabetes - the IMAGE Toolkit for the Prevention of Type 2 Diabetes in Europe', the guide sets out a range of activities for adults who are at risk of becoming diabetic. Some of the areas the toolkit targets include why it is time to act; how to support behaviour change; evaluation and quality assurance; and how to budget and finance a prevention programme.

Commenting on the guide, Dr Colin Greaves from the Peninsula College of Medicine & Dentistry at the Universities of Exeter & Plymouth in the UK said: 'If politicians and healthcare providers were to use this guidance to develop national strategies for the prevention of type 2 diabetes, this would be a quantum leap forward for healthcare policy across the region.'

'Lifestyle interventions have been proven to work and the potential healthcare cost savings are immense. If high quality programmes, based on the IMAGE guidelines, are implemented to support lifestyle change in people at risk, the incidence of type 2 diabetes can potentially be halved.'

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