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New Report Ties Diabetes to Shortened Life Expectancy

Despite medical advances enabling those with diabetes to live longer today than in the past, a 50-year-old with the disease still can expect to live 8.5 years fewer years, on average, than a 50-year-old without the disease.

This critical finding comes from a new report commissioned by The National Academy on an Aging Society and supported by sanofi-aventis U.S. The analysis -- based on data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) -- found that older adults with diabetes have a lower life expectancy at every age than those without the disease. At age 60, for example, the difference in life expectancy is 5.4 years. By age 90, the difference is one year.

"Given the rise in diabetes among boomers and seniors, these findings are alarming," said Greg O'Neill, PhD, director of the Academy. "They paint a stark picture of the impact of diabetes and its complications on healthy aging."

Indeed, the figures show a marked increase in the percentage of adults over age 50 with diabetes during the past decade: from 11 percent of non-Hispanic whites in 1998 to 18 percent in 2008, and from 22 percent of non-Hispanic blacks in 1998 to 32 percent in 2008.

The report, "Profiles of an Aging Society: Diabetes," was released to coincide with National Diabetes Awareness Month in November. It also found that, compared to older adults without diabetes, those with the disease are less likely to be employed and more likely to have other health problems, such as heart disease, depression, and disabilities

that interfere with normal life activities. The analysis was conducted by Scott M. Lynch, PhD, of the Office of Population Research at Princeton University -- using HRS data collected biannually from 1998 through 2008, which included information from more than 20,000 adults over age 50 in 1998.

Diabetes, currently afflicts 7.8 percent of the total U.S. population -- 23.6 million people, including 5.7 million undiagnosed -- but almost a quarter (23.1 percent) of individuals age 60 or older (12.2 million people). By 2034, 44.1 million Americans, including 14.6 million Medicare-eligible individuals, are expected to have diabetes. Annual diabetes-related spending is expected to rise as well, reaching \$336 billion in 2034 -- almost triple the amount researcher's estimate was spent in 2009. For example, diabetes-related Medicare spending is expected to rise from \$45 billion in 2009 to \$171 billion in 2034.

"Profiles of an Aging Society: Diabetes" can be purchased from the Online Store at www.geron.org.

Disclaimer: This article is not intended to provide medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of Trends in Medical Research or its staff.