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From getting off your medication to deciphering what prediabetes is, doctors answer questions on the disease that 3.2 million African-American adults have **BY CLAIRE SULMERS**

DOES HAVING DIABETES MEAN I HAVE TO TAKE INSULIN?

That depends. If you have type 1 diabetes, the answer is yes. Because your pancreas produces little or no insulin, the hormone has to be injected. "But with type 2 diabetes, you can start with oral medications, then follow up with insulin if the diabetes cannot be controlled," says Wilma J. Wooten, M.D., a deputy health officer for the county of San Diego. Amaryl and Glucophage are just a few of the oral medications on the market that address how glucose is used in your body.

DOES GETTING DIABETES MEAN I'LL DIE SOON? OR GO BLIND?

No. Diabetes does, however, carry risk of complications: About 65 percent of diabetics who pass away do so from heart disease or stroke. And diabetics are 60 percent more likely to develop cataracts. "Most problems can be prevented by taking good care of yourself," says Vivian Fonseca, M.D., a professor of medicine and pharmacology and the Tullis-Tulane alumni chair of diabetes at Tulane University in New Orleans. Most physicians agree that eating whole, nonprocessed

foods and controlling your weight are key to avoiding complications.

CAN I GET OFF MY MEDICATION?

That depends. "If you have type 2 diabetes, you might take medication in addition to changing your lifestyle," explains Fonseca. But you may be able to lower or even eliminate your medicine intake by losing weight, exercising and changing your eating habits. At that point, your "medication" would be an Rx for diet and exercise that you must stick to. If you have type 1 diabetes, however, you'll always need medication.

IS HOLISTIC TREATMENT AN OPTION INSTEAD OF THE TRADITIONAL KIND?

While some doctors disagree, Raphael Kellman, M.D., an expert in internal and holistic medicine who treats hormonal and endocrine issues in New York City, thinks it is possible. "If patients change their diet, make nutritional changes, and use natural compounds like banaba leaf, bitter melon, glutathione and chromium, they can promote insulin sensitivity and increase cell function. But they need to see a physician who

understands diabetes and the medications in order to do so," says Kellman.

I'VE HEARD THE TERM *DIABESITY*. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

It's a new term that seeks to describe the close relationship between diabetes and obesity. Diabesity refers to the trend of adult obesity being accompanied by diabetes. "Diabetes follows obesity almost like a shadow. Wherever you see one, it won't be long before you see the other," says Valentine J. Burroughs, M.D., of Saint Francis Hospital in Wilmington, Delaware. "Being overweight and obese can lead to insulin resistance."

OKAY, SO WHAT'S PREDIABETES?

A condition that more than 50 million Americans have. With prediabetes, you have blood sugar levels that are higher than normal, but not quite at the level of diabetes. At least one-third of prediabetics go on to get diabetes—but that means that two-thirds don't. "If you have prediabetes, know there are things that can be done immediately to at least forestall and at best prevent the onset of diabetes," says Burroughs. Heed the warning sign. >