



## Research & Education

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### Where Would You Come Out?

The results are in, and I have some good news and some bad news.

Our friends at The Center for Construction Research and Training (CPWR) conducted short medical screenings at the 27<sup>th</sup> International Convention in Las Vegas last October. Eighty-four roofers took the tests, and they ranged from 24 to 71 years of age – an average of 51 years old. These screenings were a service of the Building Trades' United Against Diabetes and Cardiovascular Disease (UAD), an initiative of four organizations, including CPWR and Dad's Day/Dollars Against Diabetes.

About 15 percent of our brothers and sisters had either "pre-diabetes" or diabetes. Only three of these roofers knew they had diabetes.

Diabetes means you have too much glucose in your blood. Glucose is a form of sugar your body uses for energy. Your blood always has some glucose in it. But too much glucose in your blood can damage your body over time.

Your body needs the hormone insulin to use glucose for energy. If your body doesn't make enough insulin or doesn't use insulin properly, you may develop diabetes.

Diabetes is serious business. It can cause heart attacks, strokes, blindness, kidney failure, and other serious health problems. Our union group, UAD, posts this information on its Web site: 21 million Americans have diabetes, and eight million more have it but have not been diagnosed. Another 54 million Americans have pre-diabetes, which means they are likely to develop the disease unless they do things to lower their risk. Diabetes is the sixth leading cause of death in our nation, and it will cost an estimated \$132 billion this year. By 2020, diabetes is expected to be 30 percent of our health & welfare fund costs.

But you can steer clear of diabetes-related health problems by keeping your blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol under control.

Unfortunately, our 84 roofers didn't have excellent results on these tests, either. Thirty-five percent had high blood pressure. Of the 65 percent with normal blood pressure, a quarter of them were being treated for the problem. With cholesterol, only 25 percent of our group had normal levels; 46 percent had elevated cholesterol and 28 percent had high cholesterol. Most people tested did not know they had high cholesterol.

Body Mass Index (BMI) is an easy way to judge if a person is overweight. It's a simple formula that analyzes the height and weight of a person. A BMI of under 25 is normal, 25 to 30 is overweight, and 30+ is obese. Forty percent of those roofers tested were overweight and 44 percent were obese.

Now the good news: 51 percent never smoked cigarettes and 31 percent are former smokers. (Smoking raises blood pressure and causes many other health problems.)

But wait, there's more good news: You can see if you are in an at-risk group then take steps to stay healthy. You're more likely to get type 2 diabetes, the most common type of diabetes, if you

- ▶ are age 45 or older
- ▶ are overweight
- ▶ are not physically active
- ▶ have a family history of diabetes
- ▶ had gestational diabetes—diabetes during pregnancy—or gave birth to a baby weighing more than 9 pounds
- ▶ have blood glucose levels that are higher than normal but not high enough to be called diabetes
- ▶ are African American, American Indian, Asian American, Pacific Islander, or Hispanic/Latino

And more good news: If you have pre-diabetes, you can take simple steps to prevent getting the full-blown disease. If you have diabetes, you can better control it if you make these choices your daily practice.

- ▶ **Exercise** increases the body's ability to use insulin. People with pre-diabetes who exercised regularly have seen their blood glucose levels drop, even when they didn't lose weight. Of course, exercise helps on many health fronts, like reducing blood pressure, improving cardiovascular fitness, and helping with weight loss.
- ▶ **Make smart food choices.** Give up fatty junk food for fruits, lean meats, fish, whole grains and low-fat dairy products. Learn when (and how much) to eat to reduce excess weight.
- ▶ If you smoke, **quit.**

So where do you think you'd come out if you took the screening? Those with diabetes should already know the many ways they can stop progression of the disease and reduce the terrible health risks of heart attack, stroke and other major problems, by following the advice of their doctors. If you're over 45, make sure you get a check on your blood glucose level.

If you or someone you love may be diabetic or pre-diabetic, you can find out more about the disease at the American Diabetes Association, [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org) or at the National Institutes of Health: <http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/>. ■

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This article was prepared with the help of CPWR – The Center for Construction Research and Training, using research funded through grant OH008307 from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Information sources include the National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse within the National Institute of Health, United Against Diabetes, and the American Diabetes Association.