

Eat healthy, stay active

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As the region's growing diabetes epidemic continues to worsen, medical personnel in the UAE have placed more focus on increasing diabetes awareness and prevention.

Dr Abdulrazzaq Ali Al Madani, President, Emirates Diabetes Society (EDS), said that diabetes is increasing around the world and statistics show that the total number of patients with diabetes is increasing year after year. "The Gulf region has one of the highest prevalence of diabetes. We conducted a study in the UAE in the year 2000 to understand the spread of the disease. It's been about 15 years. At that time it showed that the prevalence among the local population was around 24 per cent, and among the expatriates it was around 16 per cent," he said.

The Emirates Diabetes Society has initiated a new study, which was started last year and is most likely to finish by the end of next year. "The results collected till now show that the prevalence in expats has come down. We are now waiting to see the results among locals and the preliminary results have actually been quite encouraging. It looks like the number is not increasing and maybe we might even have less than 24 per cent prevalence of diabetes in the UAE. But we will know for sure only when the study is completed," Al Madani said.

Dr Madani stressed that over the last 15 years, a lot of effort has been taken by the health authorities in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and other emirates, the Ministry of Health, and the EDS to raise awareness.

"In 2000, very few people in the region knew about diabetes, how to



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**Dr Abdulrazzaq Ali Al Madani,
President, Emirates Diabetes Society**

prevent it, and how to manage it. But now almost everybody knows what diabetes is. Even if you ask a child today, he/she would know. Today people are aware about the risk factors for developing diabetes — over-eating, obesity, and lack of exercise. The awareness has increased and we can see that more and more people are trying to stay active, watch their weight and avoid diabetes. This is a good sign and shows that the efforts that were undertaken were fruitful," he added.

The two main objectives of EDS are to raise awareness and educate the public as well as health professionals. "Making people aware was a major challenge and we have had many campaigns in the past 20 years, since the formation of EDS. We carry out campaigns in malls, parks and more.

"We also go to small towns in the UAE with our 'Fight Diabetes Van' that has a team of doctors and educators, who screen, check blood sugar and examine people. This is done because some of these people find it difficult to come to big cities and hospitals to get a check-up," said the doctor.

For health professionals, EDS holds a number of conferences and workshops. They hold the annual Emirates Diabetes and Endocrine Congress in February and bring some of the best speakers in the world along with doctors from the Middle East.

"Last year we had over 2,000 attendees and this year we are looking at over 3,000. It has grown to be the biggest conference of its kind in the region," he added.

Dr Al Madani feels that there is a shortage of diabetes educators in the region. "A person with diabetes needs knowledge and needs to be educated and trained. Training includes how to check blood sugar, how to take the injection, how to take the tablet, how to take care of food, what to do when the blood sugar is high or low and many other things such as diet, etc. A person in addition to the doctor needs a dietician to teach them about the food and needs an educator who will teach them how to manage sugar.

"We started training our own diabetes educators and have certified more than 100 of them in the UAE. We still need more educators and there are plans to carry out more certificate courses," he said.

EDS has collaborated with International Diabetes Federation, the UAE University in Al Ain, and Leicester University in the UK to carry out these courses. Dr Al Madani hopes that people eat healthy, stay active, and avoid diabetes.