

Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

November 2000

The mission of the Alaska Commission on Aging is to ensure dignity and independence for Alaska's seniors and to assist them, through programs and services funded by the Commission, to lead useful and meaningful lives.



Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger is a monthly publication of the Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA)

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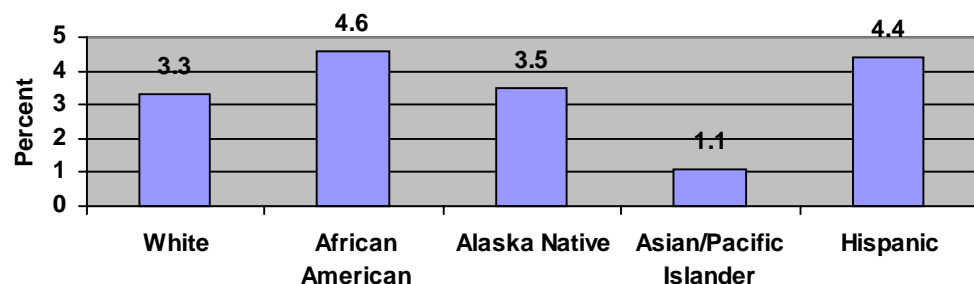
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November Is National Diabetes Month and National Alzheimer's Disease Month

Prevalence of Diabetes Among Alaskans by Race/Ethnicity



The data above, compiled in 1995 by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, shows the percentage of Alaska's population by race/ethnicity that has diabetes. This information mirrors national data showing certain race/ethnicity groups at higher risk for diabetes. Alaska Natives are at about the same risk as white Alaskans, but data indicates that the incidence of diabetes is increasing faster among Alaska Natives. This is assumed to be caused by a shift from traditional Native to Western lifestyles.

Healthy Habits, Careful Monitoring Key to Controlling Diabetes

Diabetes is on the rise in Alaska and the rest of the United States. Almost 15,000 Alaskan adults have been diagnosed with diabetes. About 3,600 Alaskans aged 65 or over have diabetes, or 11% of Alaska's senior population. Diabetes is increasing among Alaskan Natives at a higher rate than in the population as a whole. Nationwide, we are facing a diabetes epidemic among Native American elders, who are 160% more likely to die of the disease than white elders.

There is no cure for diabetes, but complications of the disease can be controlled or even avoided through healthy lifestyle choices and proper monitoring.

November is National Diabetes Month. Diabetes is a chronic, genetically determined, debilitating disease that affects every organ system. A deficiency of insulin or a decreased ability of the body to use insulin causes diabetes. Insulin is a hormone secreted by the pancreas that allows sugar to be converted to energy in our cells. Over time, uncontrolled diabetes can damage vital organs and contribute to heart disease.

Of the four main types of diabetes, the most common form is Type 2, known as adult-onset diabetes. Those at risk for type 2 diabetes include people 40 and older. Risk factors include obesity, a family history of the disease, impaired sugar tolerance, physical inactivity and race/

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Alaskan Senior Advocate, Amos Joe Alter, Passes Away



Former Alaska Commissioner on Aging Amos Joe Alter died Thursday, October 26, after surgery in a Seattle hospital. He was 84 years old.

Mr. Alter was a strong advocate for Alaskan seniors. He served on the Commission on Aging from 1991 to 1998, served on Alaska Pioneers' Homes Advisory Board from 1984 to 1998, and served on the Governor's Task Force on Eligibility and Residency for the Pioneers' Homes. He helped to get support to build Fireweed Place, an independent senior housing unit in Juneau.

Mr. Alter and his wife Kay arrived in Alaska in 1944. Mr. Alter worked as a U.S. Public Health Service engineer, ensuring water supply and food services safety, and served as Alaska territorial sanitary engineer for 21 years. Mr. Alter received many state and national awards for his personal and professional achievements.

In recognition of his service to the State of Alaska, Gov. Tony Knowles ordered state flags lowered in Mr. Alter's memory on Friday, November 3, the same day he was memorialized at his church in Juneau.

Is It Alzheimer's Disease, Or Age-Related Memory Problems?

In the March issue of *Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger*, we featured Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders. For Alzheimer's Month, we are reprinting the list of indicators below, which help assess whether memory problems may be Alzheimer's-related, or merely "forgetfulness". Consult your doctor for a more thorough assessment.

Person with Age-Related Memory Problems

- Forgets some parts of an experience
- Often remembers events later
- Usually able to follow written or spoken directions
- Can use notes as effective reminders
- Knows how to care for self
- Occasionally forgets a name

Person with Alzheimer's Disease

- Forgets whole experiences
- Rarely will remember later
- Increasingly unable to follow written or spoken directions
- Ability to use notes as reminders diminishes
- Gradually forgets how to care for self
- Erosion of vocabulary and language skills

Alzheimer's Disease Month Observances Include Candlelight Vigil and Potluck

November is National Alzheimer's Month. The Alaska Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association is observing the month with a candlelight vigil and a caregiver's potluck.

The candlelight vigil was held Thursday, November 9 at 6:30 PM at the Loussac Library in Anchorage. The vigil preceded the Alzheimer's Association's *Research Forum 2000*.

The caregivers potluck will be held Thursday, November 16 at 12:00 noon at the Alzheimer's Association Alaska Chapter, 240 E. Tudor Road in Anchorage.

For more information, please contact the Alzheimer's Association Alaska Chapter at 1-800-478-1080.

The Symptoms of Diabetes

Only half of the people who have diabetes are diagnosed, because in the early stages of diabetes there are few symptoms or the symptoms may be the same as in other health conditions. Early symptoms of diabetes may include the following:

- Extreme thirst
- Frequent urination
- Unexplained weight loss
- Blurry vision that changes from day to day
- Unusual tiredness or drowsiness
- Tingling or numbness in the hands or feet
- Frequent or recurring skin, gum or bladder infections

If you have any of these symptoms, call your family doctor right away.

Diabetes In Alaska (continued from page 1)

ethnicity. People with African, Hispanic/Latino or American Indian ancestry are at particularly high risk for type 2 diabetes, as are some Asian and Pacific Islander populations.

Diabetes is believed to be the 7th leading cause of death for all Alaskans. Most diabetes deaths are due to complications associated with the disease. These complications include blindness, kidney failure, nerve damage and cardiovascular disease. Diabetes may actually be involved in many other deaths, but it's often hard to tell if the disease is involved, particularly if the person was not diagnosed with diabetes before death.

Luckily, many of the ill affects of diabetes can be prevented by improved medical care and better education for those suffering from diabetes, to help them manage the disease themselves. Studies show that intensive treatment to control blood sugar levels in those with diabetes significantly reduces the risk of complications. Proper nutrition and exercise also help prevent or delay the onset of eye, kidney, or heart damage.

Be sure to discuss the possibility of diabetes with your doctor if you fit the risk profile or are experiencing the symptoms of diabetes listed above. Maintaining proper nutrition and exercising regularly are also important, not just to prevent or control diabetes, but for overall health as we age.

