

Diabetes: We are in it together

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Living in a household implies sharing duties and responsibilities but it could also imply sharing your diabetes. A research team from the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) has shown, through combined analyses of several studies, evidence that spousal diabetes is a diabetes risk factor. These findings, published today in the open access journal *BMC Medicine*, have important clinical implications since they can help improve diabetes detection and motivate couples to work together to reduce the risk of developing the condition.

"We found a 26% increase in the risk of developing type 2 [diabetes](#) if your spouse also has [type 2 diabetes](#)," says senior author of the study, Dr. Kaberi Dasgupta, researcher at the Research Institute of the MUHC and an associate professor of medicine at McGill University. "This may be a platform to assist clinicians to develop strategies to involve both partners. Changing health behaviour is challenging and if you have the collaboration of your partner it's likely to be easier."

Dr. Dasgupta's team, located at the Division of Clinical Epidemiology of the MUHC, wanted to see if diabetes in one partner could lead to diabetes in the other partner because many of the risk behaviours that lead to diabetes, such as poor eating habits and low physical activity, could be shared within a household.

Researchers analyzed results from six selected studies that were conducted in different parts of the world and looked at key outcomes such as age, socioeconomic status and the way in which diabetes was diagnosed in 75,498 couples.

Most of the studies used in the meta analysis relied on health records which may not always accurately record diabetes. Those that used direct blood testing suggested that diabetes risk doubles if your partner has diabetes. A strong correlation with pre-diabetes risk was also found.

"When we look at the health history of patients, we often ask about family history," says Dr. Dasgupta. "Our results suggest spousal history may be another factor we should take in consideration."

According to Dr. Dasgupta, spousal diabetes is also a potential tool for early diabetes detection. "The results of our review suggest that diabetes diagnosis in one spouse may warrant increased surveillance in the other," she says. "Moreover, it has been observed that men are less likely than women to undergo regular medical evaluation after childhood and that can result in delayed diabetes detection. As a result, men living with a spouse with diabetes history may particularly benefit from being followed more closely."

More information: Spousal diabetes as a diabetes risk factor: A systematic review and meta-analysis, *BMC Medicine* 2014, 12:12.

Provided by McGill University Health Centre

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