

# Focus on families aims to curb diabetes spread

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Family lifestyles and their impact on the health of individual family members will be the focus of a new approach to preventing diabetes.

In the first study of its kind in Britain, researchers from the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow will test whether involving whole families in weight loss and fitness initiatives is effective in preventing the development of type 2 diabetes among high-risk family members.

The £1m study will focus specifically on people of Indian and Pakistani origin, who are five times more likely to develop late onset diabetes than the rest of the population.

Researchers will look particularly at families with at least one member who has a high risk of diabetes, possibly because they are overweight or do little exercise. The study, which is currently recruiting participants living in Edinburgh and Glasgow, will encourage all family members to adopt a healthy lifestyle with the aim that this motivates and supports those individuals at risk.

The study is funded by the National Prevention Research Initiative and aims to recruit 300 families. Dieticians will visit them at home over the next three years and provide culturally-specific advice on nutrition and exercise.

Researchers hope to reduce the incidence of type 2 diabetes by 50 per cent, and believe that by focusing on high-risk families, they will find

strategies that can be applied more widely.

Raj Bhopal, Professor of Public Health at the University of Edinburgh and project leader, said: “Diabetes is increasing rapidly as we get more obese and less active. If we don’t take urgent action, it will spread in epidemic proportions.

“This family-based approach has never been tested before, but by involving the siblings and parents of at-risk individuals, we hope to provide a motivational and supportive strategy that could prevent diabetes not only in the UK, but on a global scale.”

Diabetes currently affects two million people in the UK, of which 90 per cent have type 2 (or late onset) diabetes that can lead to heart disease, stroke and blindness.

The condition develops when the body cannot make enough insulin, or when the insulin that is produced does not work properly (known as insulin resistance).

Jim McCaffery, Director of Acute Services and Workforce and executive lead for equality and diversity, NHS Lothian said: “We are delighted to be involved with this study. It is important that the health needs of all individuals are met and that we are sensitive to their needs.

“NHS Lothian is committed to meeting the equality and diversity needs of the local population by continually improving services and reducing health inequalities.”

Source: University of Edinburgh

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