Eat slowly and reduce diabetes risk

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Your parents must have told you a thousand times - don't eat so fast, slow down! Now it appears that scientific research is backing them up. At the recent joint International Congress of Endocrinology and European Congress of Endocrinology in Florence, Italy, a research team from Lithuania presented their research showing that people who eat their food quickly are 2.5 times more likely to suffer from type 2 diabetes than those who take their time during meals.

The research team led by Dr Lina Radzeviciene from the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences scientifically determined for the first time the role that eating speed has as an independent risk factor for type 2 diabetes.

Diabetes mellitus is a very common disorder caused by high levels of sugar in the bloodstream. It affects approximately 6.4% (285 million) of the worldwide population and is associated with an increased risk of heart attacks, stroke and damage to the eyes, feet and kidneys.

Europe alone counts more than 25 million people with diabetes. In most countries, diabetes is now one of the leading causes of death through its effects on cardiovascular disease: 70% to 80% of people with diabetes die of cardiovascular disease. Diabetes is ranked among the leading causes of blindness, renal failure and lower limb amputation, and type 2 diabetes represents between 85% and 95% of cases of diabetes. The total cost of caring for people with diabetes in Europe is estimated between EUR 28 billion and EUR 53 billion per year.

Dr Lina Radzeviciene commented: 'The prevalence of type 2 diabetes is increasing globally and becoming a world pandemic. It appears to involve interaction between susceptible genetic backgrounds and environmental factors. It's important to identify modifiable risk factors that may help people reduce their chances of developing the disease.'

This is not the first time that Dr Radzeviciene's team made a breakthrough in the area of diabetes research. They previously found that coffee consumption (four or more cups a day) significantly decreased the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. They also found that smoking and egg consumption (more than five eggs a week) increased the risk.

As part of the study, the team compared 234 newly diagnosed type 2 diabetes patients to a control group of 468 people who were free from the disease. The ratio between cases and control was one to two and they were matched by gender and age (±5 years).

The participants then completed an in-depth questionnaire designed to collect information on possible diabetes risk factors in which they rated their eating speed compared to others (slower, the same, faster). Body measurements (height, weight, waist and hip circumference) were also taken according to World Health Organization recommendations.

After adjusting for other risk factors - a family history of diabetes, education, morning exercise, body mass index, waist circumference, cigarette smoking and plasma triglyceride levels - the researchers found a more than twofold increase in the risk of type 2 diabetes associated with faster eating habits (odds ratio (OR) = 2.52, 95% confidence interval (CI) 1.56-4.06). Additional findings showed the cases had a higher body mass index and significantly lower education level compared to the controls.

Following their latest breakthrough, the researchers now hope to perform a larger study looking at how particular types of food, calorie intake, physical exercise, and psychological and emotional well-being affect diabetes risk factors.

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