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More exercise may prevent diabetes in black women

Thu Dec 18, 2008 9:42pm IST

By Amy Norton

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Taking a walk instead of turning on the TV may help African-American women lower their risk of type 2 diabetes, a large study suggests.

Researchers found that among more than 45,000 African-American women they followed for a decade, those who said they walked for exercise at least five hours per week were one-third less likely to develop type 2 diabetes than non-walkers.

Furthermore, women who watched five or more hours of television a day were 86 percent more likely to develop diabetes than those who watched less than one hour per day.

Few studies have looked at the benefits of exercise for African-American women, who are at particularly high risk of type 2 diabetes. The current results show that more exercise and less TV is good for black women as well as white women, said researcher Dr. Julie R. Palmer.

"The finding that brisk walking for a few hours a week or longer reduces diabetes risk may be the most important finding of all," she told Reuters Health. "This is something almost all women can do in the course of their daily lives."

Palmer and her colleagues at Boston University report the findings in the American Journal of Epidemiology.

The researchers based their results on data from the ongoing Black Women's Health Study. Palmer's team found that between 1995 and 2005, the risk of newly diagnosed type 2 diabetes was significantly lower among women who said they regularly took a brisk walk -- even with factors like age, income and diet considered.

What's more, Palmer pointed out, the study included a large number of women who were severely obese, and regular exercise made a difference for them as well. "This is important," she said, "because it suggests a way to reduce diabetes risk even among the women who are at highest risk of the disease."

SOURCE: American Journal of Epidemiology, online December 4, 2008.

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