Can Detecting Diabetes Early Reduce the Risk of Heart Disease?

June 9, 2015

When it comes to the link between heart disease and diabetes, timing may be everything. Results from a new computer model hint that screening, diagnosing and treating type 2 diabetes sooner rather than later might decrease a person's risk of developing cardiovascular problems down the road, according to findings published in Diabetes Care and reported by Reuters.

Researchers used data from a large European study of people ages 40 to 69 who hadn't been previously diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. Then scientists screened these participants for the illness and treated those who tested positive. Researchers used a computer model to factor in the average progression of the disease in patients, resulting health problems and overall health care costs over time.

Called the "Michigan Model," it estimated what could have happened to the participants had their diagnoses been delayed by a time frame of either three or six years.

Results suggested that when diabetes screening was delayed by three years, about 11 percent of people would suffer a heart problem within the next five years. When screening wasn't delayed, the model's results showed 8 percent of participants experienced a heart problem. When diabetes testing was postponed by six years, researchers estimated that 13 percent of people screened would suffer from heart disease.

But the findings didn't convince some diabetes experts. "I would be hard-pressed to believe that three years makes a big difference" in diabetes outcomes, said Richard Kahn, MD, the former chief scientific and medical officer of the American Diabetes Association. (The U.S. Preventive Task Force has said it won't use the study model for its diabetes recommendations.)

There's also a similar debate about the costs and benefits of early treatment for breast cancer. For more information on this health issue, click here.

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