

Let's Prevent type 2 Diabetes: Step by Step.



By José Cortez

Member of NDEP's
*Small Steps. Big
Rewards. Team to
Prevent Diabetes*

Nearly two million Hispanics and Latinos in this country are living with diabetes. The government estimates that a Hispanic female child born in 2000 has a 50 percent chance of developing diabetes in her lifetime. This is an alarming statistic—especially considering the fact that Latinos will be Arizona's majority population in the coming decades. Diabetes threatens the future of our community.

Ten years ago, I started taking steps to get healthy. I was 46 years old, feeling out of shape and older than my age. Around this time, I began learning about different health risks prevalent within the Latino community. While doing this research, I learned about the diabetes epidemic and the health risks associated with people in my community and of my age. My wife, a Native American and member of the Pima tribe, also told me that 50 percent of her tribe had been diagnosed with diabetes. I realized that not only were my wife and I at risk for type 2 diabetes, but our children were also. I had to improve the health of my family and community because I didn't want this deadly disease or anyone else to suffer from it.

I started my journey to better health with a commitment to hike a local mountain, Mount Piestewa (formerly Squaw Peak), every morning. An early morning hike is not for everyone, but, for me, it was a small price to pay for how much better I felt physically and mentally. I was relaxed at work and dealt with stressful situations more effectively. I also became increasingly aware of my eating habits and began making healthier food choices. This simple routine of hiking every day changed my life--and my outlook on life.

That's when I noticed some of my colleagues at work were having a difficult time just walking around the block. I work at a local community development corporation. We are responsible for improving the quality of life of Hispanics/Latinos in Phoenix, yet we had staff members that could not walk a short distance without becoming winded. It was clear that if the corporation was truly going to serve the community, all of us needed to be healthy enough to do so.

I took it upon myself to show my co-workers how to become physically active. I began a workplace health and wellness program to help my colleagues get moving. I used my research about diabetes in our community and my personal experiences with physical activity and eating well to develop the program. My goal was to make my co-workers, and subsequently, the Hispanics/Latinos community in the Phoenix area, aware of our predisposition to diabetes.

Today, thanks to the National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) and the "Prevengamos diabetes tipo 2. Paso a Paso." public education campaign, we are moving forward to increase our community's awareness that type 2 diabetes can be prevented. The Diabetes Prevention Program clinical trial has shown that the onset of diabetes can be prevented or delayed when people at risk for type 2 diabetes, or with a condition called pre-diabetes, lose a small amount weight by getting 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week and eating healthy foods in smaller portions. I am working with my community to let them know that it is possible to prevent diabetes just by making small changes in some of our routines leading to the big reward of delaying or preventing diabetes and its complications.

Nothing happens overnight. But we as a community can begin to turn back the tide of this epidemic that threatens us if we begin to get moving and start taking small steps today! *Prevengamos la Diabetes tipo 2. Paso a Paso.*

Jose Cortez, a 56-year-old father of six children is the public relations manager at the community development corporation, Chicanos Por La Causa in Phoenix, AZ. As a member of the National Diabetes Education Program's "Small Steps. Big Rewards. Team to Prevent Diabetes," Cortez is leading by

example that type 2 diabetes can be prevented in the Hispanic/Latino community. For more information and resources on diabetes prevention contact the NDEP at 1-800-438-5383 or log on to <http://www.ndep.nih.gov>. Materials are available in Spanish.