

TL's rate of diabetes 5 times city average

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ago we added our diabetes program. Many are dually diagnosed and have depression, PTSD, psychosis. And it's very costly."

Diabetes occurs when a high amount of sugar in the bloodstream can't get into cells so it can become an energy source. The body can't process the sugar because it doesn't produce enough insulin — which delivers the sugar, or glucose, into the cells — or use the insulin efficiently.

Having too much sugar in the bloodstream isn't good. It starts tearing up organs. High blood sugar can cause vision loss, kidney failure, leg, foot and toe amputations. Among the saddest cases of diabetic complications for celebrities was singer Ella Fitzgerald whose legs were amputated below the knee.

There are two kinds of diabetes, Type I, which can be inherited and shows up early in life, and Type II, called adult onset and accounts for about 95% of all diagnosed cases. The older you get, the more vulnerable to Type II. You may have diabetes in your family. You may be overweight and inactive and eating poorly. Those are major contributing factors.

Once diagnosed, keeping the sugar level in your blood down isn't easy. Besides sugary stuff, carbohydrates like bread and potatoes, which turn to sugar pretty fast, are danger foods. You can eat them moderately but you have to keep track — or carbo count — to not drive your blood sugar up.

Diabetics keep track with a glucose meter. Insert a plastic test strip, put a drop of blood on it from a pinprick and a number appears on the meter's tiny screen. Normal: 90 to 120. Slightly lower and you actually need a little more sugar (or glucose tablets) or you'll get woozy. If high, a quick walk around the block or drinking lots of water will bring it down. A lot of insulin does, too.

So diabetics control diabetes with shots of insulin, or with pills. Or, in the case of Dr. Dreame, fortitude.

Geof Godard, 63, is Dr. Dreame since he got his diabetes under control. He's an actor who plays quirky characters in a white coat when he gets the chance, his unusual hobby as a retired security guard.

He and his wife had lost everything in Manhattan when they came West in 1999 having lived here in 1973-74. They were homeless, living in shelters until he got a security guard job.

Five years ago, a St. Anthony clinic doctor diagnosed him with diabetes from his blood test and asked how he felt about that.

"I didn't know how to take it," Godard recalled recently in the clinic. "Both my grandfathers had it."

But the diagnosis changed his life.

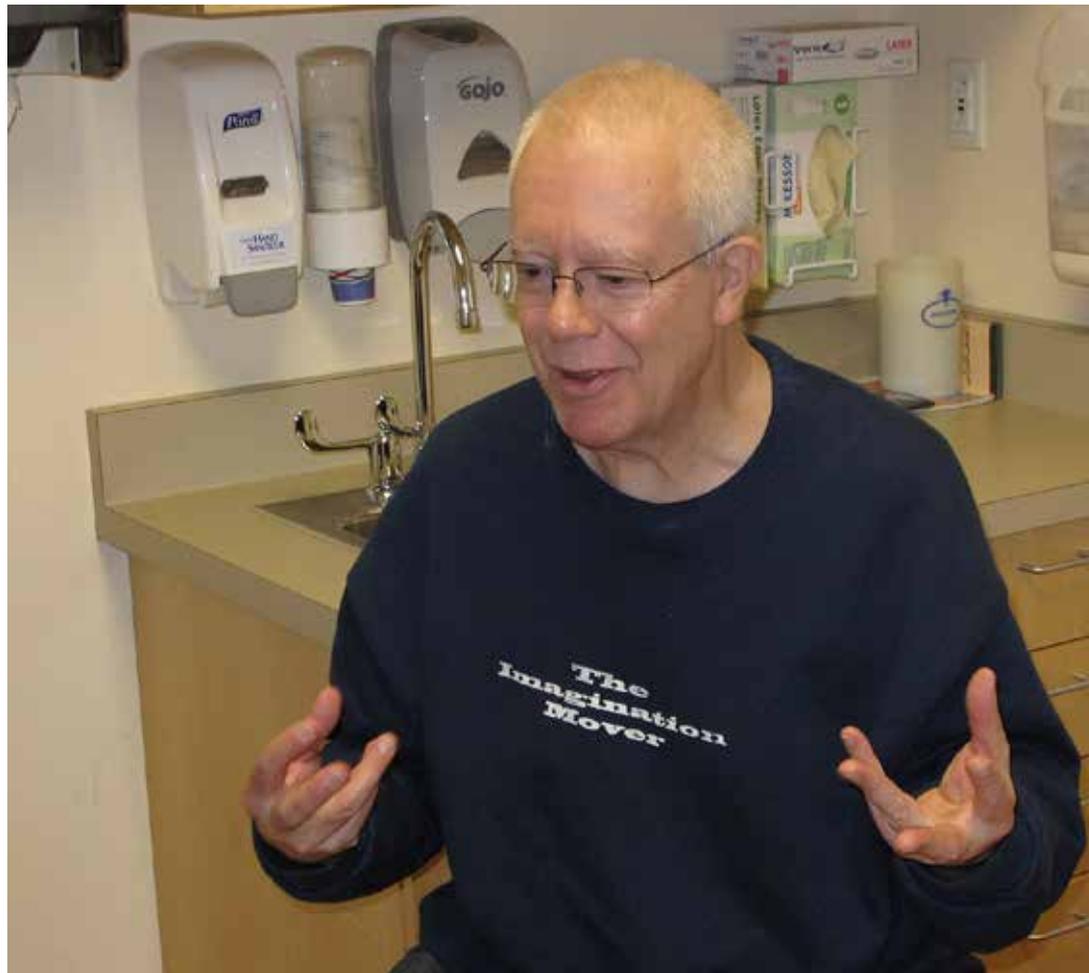
Godard stopped working and began shedding excess weight gained from eating "crazy" for years. He dropped 60 pounds, which he has kept off. He drastically changed his diet. He avoids public transportation, walks 30-60 minutes a day, loves the test of a hill crest.

"Before, I'd see food and eat it," he says. "Now I resist. It's rare I would ever eat ice cream. I made up my mind."

He drinks only water, coffee, sometimes diet soda, eats veggies, lentils and fish, at times a small amount of lean meat. He's critical of chicken, growing passionate when he says it's filled with unnatural things. He laments the lack of a supermarket in the neighborhood.

Godard doesn't take readings on the glucometer they gave him. "I'm very bad about that — I don't like poking myself," he admits. "I take Effexor for depression — I can't think without it — and a multivitamin, no diabetes medication. I think I can handle things."

When he visits the clinic every few



Passionate about his health now, Geof Godard, left, re-created himself as a diabetic in control and as an actor, Dr. Dreame.

Hakima Fannane, below, was hungry a lot, sometimes shaky and depressed before being diagnosed 14 years ago "by accident" in Morocco. Coming to the United States in 2001, she found St. Anthony's clinic through a friend and, challenged by diet and depression, has been on a pill regimen.

PHOTOS BY TOM CARTER



weeks the doctors and nurses agree: They like his results.

Woody Carson, 61, is also in control, though he goes to the UCSF clinic on Parnassus. At 26, he was constantly thirsty, drinking gallons of water daily, peeing all the time and losing weight. Plus his teeth were loose and his gums bleeding. His dentist couldn't figure it out.

"He sent me to a doctor and I got a blood test," Carson says, sitting at a chess board in a cafe at Eddy and Fillmore. "They called me into the emergency room that night and told me I had diabetes. They put me on insulin."

Ever since, Carson has been shooting up three or four times daily, sometimes more, depending on "when I need a sugar correction." That means not just before meals — because food drives the sugar count up — but anytime his count goes high.

"A 300 reading, I'll do five or six units of insulin to bring it down. You can eat a piece of cake. You can eat any-

thing. You just have to adjust. Eat things in moderation, though."

Carson is on kidney dialysis three times a week. Hypertension got him into trouble, not diabetes, he says. But it's hard to say. More than two-thirds of adults with diabetes had hypertension or used blood pressure medications in 2005-08, according to medical studies. He is waiting for a kidney replacement. Until then, he is staying on top of things and says that in 25 years he has never passed out from a low count.

"You have to listen to people who know what they're doing and follow what they say," he cautions.

Carson thinks he handles diabetes pretty well.

Doctors and nurses praise diabetic patients who take responsibility for their health. One-on-one counseling is effective to get the idea across, they say. A bigger challenge is educating groups and the greater community outside.

At the Curry Senior Center on Turk Street, seniors have always been able to

talk one-on-one with a doctor about diabetes. But in September the clinic added group discussions so folks can better understand the disease and enhance their education. But few attended and not everyone was willing to talk. "It's a private matter and they don't want to expose what they're doing wrong," says Dave Knego, Curry's executive director.

"We're trying to socialize medicine so people are comfortable talking about their own health. We have a senior to talk about self care in a regular conversation — your health in a non-threatening way. We give a lot of reinforcement. We want to make it fun."

Curry also has a six-week class for diabetics geared to learning self-management.

Pharmacists from UCSF come to Glide twice a week to talk to diabetes patients and, under a \$2,500 UCSF grant, so do the school's grad students, emphasizing self-management in Glide's Empowerment program. Classes are offered on healthy choices, how to cook, vascular problems, stress management, exercise and quitting smoking, all having a bearing on diabetes.

"We address all these issues," Karen Hill says. "Some can manage, some can't. And diabetes is different if you're housed."

The homeless diabetic on the street faces monumental challenges. Just trying to keep track of diabetic paraphernalia — pills, insulin, syringes, the blood meter and supplies — requires a clear head and efficiency. But where to sleep, inject, store your stuff that others want to steal thinking it's dope, having a cut on the foot that doesn't heal, smoking and drinking, soup kitchens loaded with carbs, mom-and-pop stores trumpeting sugary snacks, are conditions that couldn't be tougher. "Social determinants of health," medics call them.

And often a homeless person arrives at a clinic with an array of health problems.

To find undiagnosed diabetics, Hill hired a social worker to meet everyone without health insurance who comes into the St. Francis Memorial Hospital emergency room Wednesday evenings. In a recent three-month period, the worker saw 87 patients, 14 were found to be diabetic, whom she counseled about their blood sugar. Their names were sent to the city's other providers to aid future health care.