

10 misconceptions about diabetes

"I see a United Nations keenly aware that if the global agenda is to be properly addressed, a partnership with civil society is not an option; it is a necessity."

Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations

1. Diabetes is not a killer disease – False!

In fact, diabetes is a global killer, rivalling HIV/AIDS in its deadly reach. The disease kills more than 3 million people a year. Every 10 seconds a person dies from diabetes-related causes.

2. Diabetes only affects rich countries – False!

Diabetes hits all populations, regardless of income. It is becoming increasingly common. More than 230 million people worldwide now have diabetes. This will grow to more than 350 million by 2025. In many countries in Asia, the Middle East, Oceania and the Caribbean, diabetes affects 12-20% of the population. In 2025, 80% of all cases of diabetes will be in low- and middle-income countries.

3. Diabetes is heavily funded globally – False!

Official Overseas Development Aid to the health sector in 2002 reached 2.9 billion USD, of which a mere 0.1% went to fund ALL non-communicable chronic diseases (NCDs). Most of the 2.9 billion USD went to support HIV/AIDS. Despite diabetes having a deadly global impact comparable to HIV/AIDS, it had to share the tiny 0.1% of the total NCD funding. In addition, the World Bank gave 4.2 billion USD in loans for health, population and nutrition between 1997 and 2002. Only 2.5% of the 4.2 billion USD went to chronic diseases.

4. Diabetes care is not costly – False!

Diabetes care is costly and has the potential to cripple any healthcare system. The economic opportunities that the United Nations wants to create for developing countries through the Millennium Development Goals will be greatly undermined by the economic impact of diabetes in low- and middle-income countries.



5. Diabetes only affects old people – False!

In reality, diabetes affects all age groups. By 2007, 230 million people between the ages of 20 and 79 will have diabetes. In developing countries diabetes will affect about 30 million people between ages 20-39, roughly 70 million between ages 40-59 and over 40 million between ages 60-79. In developed countries, diabetes will affect some 5 million people between ages 20-39, roughly 30 million between ages 40-59 and over 40 million between ages 60-79.

6. Diabetes predominantly affects men – False!

In fact, diabetes affects both men and women, and is rising among women. It is also increasingly dramatically among youth and threatening to decimate indigenous populations.

7. Diabetes is the result of unhealthy 'lifestyles' – False!

The reality is that the poor and children have limited choices when it comes to living conditions, diet and education.

8. Diabetes cannot be prevented – False!

In fact, up to 80% of type 2 diabetes is preventable by changing diet, increasing physical activity and improving the living environment.

9. Diabetes prevention is too expensive – False!

Many inexpensive and cost-effective interventions exist. Proven strategies for improving the living environment, changing diet and increasing physical activity can reverse the pandemic.

10. We all have to die of something – True but. . .

Death is of course inevitable but it does not need to be slow, painful or premature. In 2007, diabetes will cause 3.5 million deaths globally. With awareness, prevention and appropriate care, many of these deaths can be prevented.

The idea for '10 misconceptions about diabetes' is based on the World Health Organization's global report: 'Preventing chronic diseases: a vital investment', which presents 10 common misunderstandings about chronic diseases. The data comes from various sources, including: Roglic G et al: The Burden of Mortality Attributable to Diabetes: Realistic estimates for the year 2000. Diabetes Care 28: 2130-2135. The Diabetes Atlas. IDF 2006 in print. Yach D et al: The global burden of chronic diseases. JAMA 2004).

