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Georgia's Diabetes Epidemic: Big Problem, Bigger Belt?

Do we need another notch on our belts in Georgia? Unfortunately, it looks like Georgia may need to buy a bigger belt to go with our growing waistlines and decreasing health status. According to a report in the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, Georgia ranks amongst the highest diabetes rates in the country along with other Southeastern states.

This seminal research establishes a geographic belt based on patterns of diabetes in 644 clustered communities in portions of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia; and the entire state of Mississippi. The report also indicates that the states in the "diabetes belt" have a diabetes rate of 11% or greater, whereas the national average is 8%. In addition to the high prevalence rate of diabetes, the rate of obesity was also higher in the diabetes belt, 32.9% compared to 26.1% in the rest of the country.

"Diabetes in the South is at epidemic proportions. This should be a wakeup call for everyone in Georgia; we need to work together to encourage healthier lifestyles. The burden of diabetes is felt by more than the patient, it impacts the entire family," says Harry Strothers, III, MD, President of the Georgia Academy of Family Physicians.

The financial burden is also a problem for Georgia's health care infrastructure with one of every five health care dollars is spent caring for someone with diabetes. Patients with diabetes have more hospital stays and more emergency room visits.

Dr. Strothers, "We don't want people to feel that it is just too late, it is never too late! Georgian's can reduce their chance of developing type 2 diabetes, or can help control their diabetes, with physical activity and reducing their weight with proper nutrition. This is a conversation we need to have with our kids, parents, and each other. "

We encourage people to schedule time with their family physician to have an annual exam, discuss risk factors for diabetes, and prevention activities. This is an opportunity to talk about a healthier future.

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Established in 1947, the GAFP is a member chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians. GAFP strives to promote the specialty of family medicine through the education of and service to Family Physician in Georgia. Boasting a membership of 2,500 family physicians, family medicine residents, and medical students, the organization supports those who aspire to achieve excellence and who are committed to delivering it. For more information, please visit us on the web at www.gafp.org or call (404) 321-7445