

# BATTLING DIABETES—A GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY WITH LOCAL SOLUTIONS

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**D**iabetes mellitus is no longer a disease confined to age or affluence. Today, it stands as one of the most serious and fast-growing health challenges worldwide. According to the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), over 537 million adults were living with diabetes in 2021, and this number is expected to reach 643 million by 2030 and 783 million by 2045 if current trends persist<sup>1</sup>.

The condition, primarily categorized into Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes, affects the body's ability to regulate blood sugar levels. While Type 1 is often genetic and diagnosed early in life, Type 2 diabetes, which constitutes about 90% of cases globally, is largely preventable and linked to lifestyle factors such as poor diet, physical inactivity, and obesity<sup>2</sup>.

## PAKISTAN'S RISING BURDEN:

Pakistan faces an especially dire situation. A 2023 study by the IDF reported that approximately 33 million adults in Pakistan have diabetes, placing it among the top three countries globally in terms of disease prevalence<sup>3</sup>. This figure is not just a statistic—it reflects a health system under strain, families struggling to afford long-term treatment, and a public that remains largely unaware of early symptoms and prevention.

The alarming rise is attributed to rapid urbanization, limited access to healthcare, poor awareness, and cultural dietary habits. Unfortunately, a large proportion of the population remains undiagnosed, increasing the risk of complications like heart disease, kidney failure, and nerve damage.

## THE ROAD TO CONTROL:

Despite its scale, diabetes is manageable and, in many cases, preventable. Control efforts must focus on the following pillars:

1. Early Detection and Education

Promoting routine screenings, especially in high-risk groups, can lead to earlier diagnosis and better outcomes. Public health campaigns should raise awareness about symptoms such as excessive thirst, fatigue, frequent urination, and slow wound healing.

## 2. Lifestyle Interventions

A healthy lifestyle remains the most effective defense. Studies show that losing just 5–10% of body weight can significantly improve blood sugar levels and reduce the risk of Type 2 diabetes<sup>4</sup>. Encouraging regular physical activity (at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week), promoting a balanced diet rich in whole grains, vegetables, and healthy fats, and reducing processed sugars can all make a difference.

## 3. Affordable Access to Care

Diabetes management involves regular monitoring, medication, and in many cases, insulin. In countries like Pakistan, where many patients pay out of pocket, public health systems need to subsidize essential medications and support long-term treatment strategies.

## 4. Policy and Urban Planning

Governments must create environments that support healthy living—like building parks, ensuring safe walkways, regulating fast food advertising, and introducing sugar taxes. These policies can nudge communities toward better lifestyle choices.

## CONCLUSION

Diabetes may be a chronic disease, but it does not have to be a life sentence. With early detection, consistent management, and the right support systems, millions of lives can be improved and even saved. Countries like Pakistan must adopt a whole-of-society approach—where healthcare professionals, educators, policymakers, and the public work together. The time

to act is now. Delay will only deepen the burden.

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