

# Rope in the Family

Audrina Gan

**SingHealth joins the war on diabetes by partnering GPs to offer screenings for first-degree relatives of patients with diabetes.**

The figures are alarming—by 2030, the number of people with diabetes in Singapore is projected to increase by 50 per cent, from the current 400,000 to 600,000.

To help put a lid on the increase, SingHealth is partnering 37 general practitioners (GPs) in its STOP Diabetes programme, to offer diabetes screenings to first-degree relatives (parents, siblings and children) of patients with type 2 diabetes. The aim is to screen 500 of them by March 2017.

The programme is part of SingHealth's ongoing efforts to partner community organisations to increase awareness about illness prevention and healthy lifestyles. Screening is open to those aged 30 and above who have no known diabetes or impaired glucose tolerance. It includes a blood test and checks on blood glucose, cholesterol, blood pressure, height and weight.

"Studies show that type 2 diabetes has a strong genetic link. Immediate family members are two to six times more likely to have the disease," said Dr Emily Ho, Director, SingHealth Regional Health System, and Consultant, Department of Endocrinology, Singapore General Hospital.

She said early detection and intervention are crucial to keeping the condition under control. By partnering GPs to screen relatives, timely help can be given to delay and prevent complications. "GPs in the community are close to the people and well-suited to take on this role. They can provide follow-up treatment and consultation to those diagnosed with diabetes."

She said encouraging healthy lifestyles early will also prevent young people from getting pre-diabetes, or being at risk of the disease itself. "As more Singaporeans adopt a Western diet and sedentary lifestyle, more will be diagnosed with diabetes at an earlier age. More teenagers are becoming overweight, putting them at a higher risk of getting diabetes now, compared to the situation 20 years ago," she said.



Dr Eugene Chan (above) from My Family Clinic at Punggol Waterway Terrace is among the first GPs to partner SingHealth in the screenings.

He said GPs are in a better position to educate patients on the importance of early detection. "As a family physician, I try to build relationships with patients and through this, encourage them, especially those at high risk, to go for diabetes screening. Some are reluctant, but after speaking to them a few times, they agree and go because they understand the importance of early diagnosis."

Dr Chan said that newly-diagnosed patients have no symptoms or complications but early detection is important to prevent complications. "You can get poor vision or renal failure, or even undergo amputations when complications arise."

He usually lets patients try lifestyle management for six months to see if their conditions improve. If not, they will need medication.

As the main risks for diabetes are a sedentary lifestyle, obesity and family history, he recommends that people have 150 minutes of moderate exercise every week, and eat brown rice, more fruit, vegetables, fish and chicken and less red meat. He also encourages the overweight to lose 10 per cent of their weight over six months.

To register for the screening, call the SingHealth STOP Diabetes hotline at  
**6702 5485 / 6702 5486 / 6702 5487**  
 (Mondays to Fridays, 9.30am – 5.00pm),  
 or  
 email [stopdiabetes@singhealth.com.sg](mailto:stopdiabetes@singhealth.com.sg).