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## Diabetes costs USA more than wars, disasters, study says

By Liz Szabo, USA TODAY

Uncontrolled diabetes wreaks havoc on the body, often leading to kidney failure, blindness and death. A new study shows that the nation's unchecked diabetes epidemic exacts a heavy financial toll as well: \$174 billion a year.

That's about as much as the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and the global war on terrorism combined. It's more than the \$150 billion in damage caused by Hurricane Katrina.

The incidence of diabetes has ballooned — there are 1 million new cases a year — as more Americans become overweight or obese, according to the study, released Wednesday by the American Diabetes Association. The cost of diabetes — both in direct medical care and lost productivity — has swelled 32% since 2002, the report shows.

Diabetes killed more than 284,000 Americans last year, according to the diabetes association.

Diabetes costs the nation nearly as much as cancer, whose costs in 2006 totaled \$206.3 billion, although cancer kills twice as many people, according to the American Cancer Society.

Even those without diabetes help pay the bill.

The mounting costs affect everyone with insurance, through rising premiums and copays, says Paul Fronstin of the Employee Benefit Research Institute, who was not involved with the report. About half of diabetics have medical insurance through government programs such as Medicare, the report shows.

Providing routine care — such as doctor's visits and medications — costs relatively little, according to the report. The real expenses come from uncontrolled diabetes, which can lead patients to require dialysis and kidney transplants, says Ann Albright, a diabetes expert at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and president of health care and education at the American Diabetes Association, which paid for the study.

About half of diabetes costs go to inpatient hospital care, the study shows. Because diabetes makes people so much sicker, it increases the time that people stay in the hospital for other problems by nearly 50%.

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Albright expects the number of people diagnosed with diabetes to increase, given that many Americans are "pre-diabetic," with problems handling insulin and sugar.

Diabetes "will ruin a generation of Americans," says Helen Darling, president of the National Business Group on Health, a non-profit that represents large employers. Over the next few decades, she says, diabetes will handicap both state and local economies, as communities divert money from education and other important areas to care for patients.

"It's a sad story that should cause us to take action," Albright says.

Find out how much diabetes costs your community at [www.diabetes.org/cost](http://www.diabetes.org/cost).

*Contributing: Bruce Rosenstein*



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