

This booklet was first produced in 2005 and is available to all organizations working in the field of health education.

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Red Cross	Santa Rita Hill Corozal	422-3048
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Orange Walk District

BCVI Office	Romualda Cal Orange Walk	322 -0178
BFLA Clinic (Orange Walk)	Holy Trinity Street Orange Walk	302-3481
Northern Regional Hospital	Orange Walk	322-2072 322-0871
Red Cross	Jabiru Street Orange Walk	322-0178

Stann Creek District

BCVI Office	Southern Regional Hospital Dangriga	522-2078
BFLA Clinic (Dangriga)	5 Plum Street Dangriga	502-2280
Dr John Price Memorial Clinic	Independence	523-2176
Health Center	Independence	523-2019
Health Center	San Juan	520-3043
Red Cross	Gadsby Ramos Street Dangriga	522-2034 522-2146
Southern Regional Hospital	Dangriga	522-2078

Toledo District:

BCVI Office	Punta Gorda Hospital	722-2025
BFLA Clinic	Front Street Punta Gorda	722-2289
Primary Health Care Toledo	Punta Gorda	722-2145
Punta Gorda Hospital	Punta Gorda	722-2026
Red Cross	Main Street Punta Gorda	722-2150

Public Health Bureau	San Pedro	226-2536
Queen's Square Health Center	Belize City	227-0559
Belize Red Cross Headquarters	1 Gabourel Lane Belize City	227-3319 227-3617
Red Cross	San Pedro	610-4722 226-2660
Universal Health Care Services	Blue Marlin / Chancellor Avenue Belize City	223-7866 223-7870

Cayo District:

AIDS Hotline	San Ignacio	824 3571
BCVI Office	Red Cross Building, Belmopan	822-3541
BFLA Clinic (Belmopan)	Belmopan Hospital Compound	802-3095
BFLA Clinic (San Ignacio)	Church Street San Ignacio	824-2648
La Loma Luz Hospital	Santa Elena	804-2985 824-2087
Ministry of Health	Belmopan	822-2325
Mopan Clinic	Benque Viejo	823-2079
National Council on Ageing	35 Mussel Creek Street, Belmopan	822-1546
Red Cross	Cemetery Road Belmopan	822-2914 822-3541
Red Cross	Joseph Andrews Drive, San Ignacio	824-4804
Western Regional Hospital	Belmopan	822-2264 822-2263

Corozal District

Corozal Hospital	Corozal	422-2076
Outpatient Clinic	Corozal	422-2080

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Acknowledgements

The National Council on Ageing would like to thank Miss Lyndsey Chapman for researching this information and compiling this health booklet for Older Women in Belize.

Lyndsey Chapman came to Belize from Challenges Worldwide in the United Kingdom, to work with the National Council on Ageing as a volunteer. Her interest in education and development issues has benefited, not only the National Council on Ageing, but all Women in Belize by her dedication to completing this information booklet.

The Older Women's Health Issues booklet will be used by Women's Officers from the Women's Department, working in each of the Districts, to educate and promote discussion of health issues with Women in the community.

Contacts

Belize District:

Name	Address	Phone Number
Alliance Against Aids	5766 Meighan Ave Belize City	223-6493 Helpline: 223-6911
BCVI National Eye Clinic	Princess Margaret Drive Belize City	203-5206
BCVI Spectacle clinic	Princess Margaret Drive Belize City	203-4607
Belize Diagnostic Center	218 Leslie Street / Meighan Avenue Belize City	224-5778 224-5779
Belize Medical Associates	5791 St Thomas Street, Belize City	223-0303/04 223-3835/36 223-0302
Health Center	Caye Caulker	226-0166
Health Center	Hattieville	225-6106
Health Center	Ladyville	225-2765
Karl Heausner Memorial Hospital	Belize City	223-1548
Matron Roberts Health Center	Belize City	227-7170 227-7176
Mercy Care Center	1955 Mercy Lane Coral Grove Belize City	223-0344
National AIDS Commission	8 17th Street Kings Park Area Belize City	223-7592 223-7594

Older Men's Health Issues

Many of the health issues that affect women also affect men. The information relating to arthritis, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, hypertension, nutrition and osteoporosis are also applicable to older men and it is important that they should be aware of these health issues and get regular check ups.

It is important to make sure the men in your life, especially the older men, go for regular health check ups at the doctors and that if they or you suspect they are suffering from a particular health problem that they get it looked at.

Particular health issues that relate to men are cancer of the penis, testicles and prostate, alcohol related diseases, impotence, sexually transmitted diseases and heart problems.

Prostrate Problems

Three conditions which can cause problems with the prostate:

1. Prostatitis - An inflammation of the prostate
2. Benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH) - An enlarged prostate with no signs of cancer
3. Prostate cancer

Prostate problems including cancer are primarily a disease of ageing. Incidences increase steadily after the age of 50.

If you notice that the men in your life are going to the toilet more often, passing blood in his urine or having problems starting to urinate you should encourage him to go to the doctor and have his prostate examined.

Risk factors of prostrate cancer:

- Aged 65 over
- Have a parent or sibling with prostrate cancer
- Have recurring prostate infections
- Have a history of disease
- Have taken testosterone

Foreword

The National Council on Ageing was officially established on the 10th February 2003. It is a mechanism mandated by cabinet through its approval of the national policy for older persons. The policy focuses on achievement of goals in nine areas which include health and nutrition and education and the media.

The 8th of March is International Women's Day and this day provides an opportunity to reflect on the progress made to advance women's equality, to assess the challenges facing women in contemporary society, to consider future steps to enhance the status of women and, of course, to celebrate the gains made in these areas. Throughout this week in Belize there will be various exercises and activities to promote and celebrate the women of Belize.

The National Council on Ageing felt that this would be the ideal opportunity to launch an information booklet on Older Women's Health Issues. It is hoped this booklet will help inform women, old and young alike, about health problems that become more prevalent with age. Helping them to recognize the signs and symptoms, preventative measures they could take and organizations that can provide support.

This booklet is entitled Older Women's Health Issues. However it is not only exclusively for women as many of the health problems discussed also affect men. Men, as well as women, need to be equally aware of the health issues that may affect them in later life. Ageing is a lifelong process and preparation for the later stages of life is essential. Through education, the sharing of facts, information and general knowledge it is hoped to increase awareness of the ageing process and prepare persons for their old age in Belize.

Arthritis

What is arthritis?

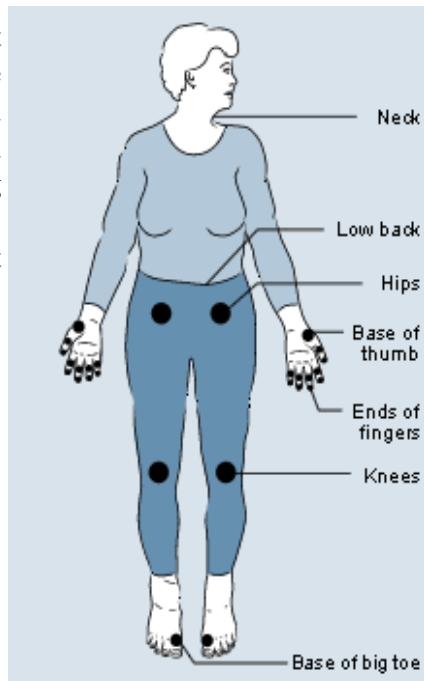
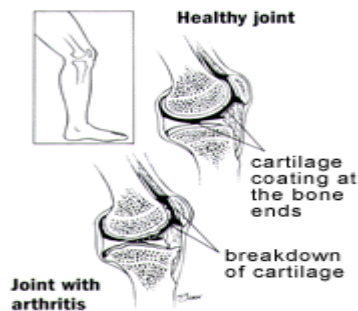
Arthritis causes pain and loss of movement. It can affect joints in any part of the body. It is often a chronic disease, which means it can affect you over a long period of time. The more serious forms can cause swelling, warmth, redness and pain.

Did you know the three most common kinds of arthritis in older people are:

1. Osteoarthritis
2. Rheumatoid Arthritis
3. Gout

Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis in older people. Osteoarthritis rarely develops before the age of 40 but affects nearly everyone past the age of 60. Nearly three times as many women as men have osteoarthritis.

Osteoarthritis mostly affects cartilage (the tissue that cushions the end of the bones within the joints) and often affects the hands and the large weight-bearing joints of the body such as the knees and hips. It occurs when cartilage begins to wear and decay.



Osteoporosis is preventable

A diet that is rich in calcium and vitamin D and a lifestyle that includes regular weight bearing exercises are the best way to prevent weakened bones in later life.

Did you know...

Not only dairy products are high in calcium but also:

- Canned fish with soft bones
- Dark green leafy vegetables
- Calcium fortified foods such as orange juice, breads and cereals



Being out in the sun for a total of twenty minutes everyday helps most peoples bodies to make enough vitamin D

Vitamin D is used by the body to absorb calcium. Sources of vitamin D include eggs, fatty fish and cereal.

Examples of weight bearing exercises include:

- Walking
- Jogging
- Playing tennis
- Dancing

It is suggested that you do weight bearing exercises three to four times per week

Herbs and Vitamins

Purslane is rich in vitamins, calcium and other minerals that protect, build and strengthen bones. **Glucosamine** is a vitamin available in Belize that is helpful for the strengthening of bones and joints.



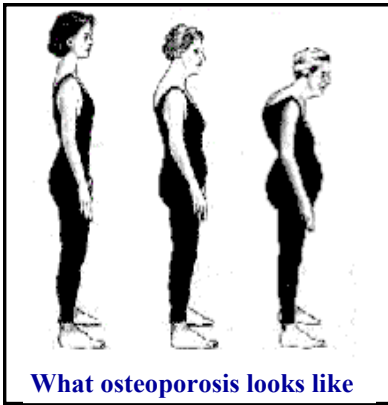
To test for osteoporosis a bone density x-ray is advised. They are available at Belize Diagnostic Center for \$65.00 + tax .

Osteoporosis

What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a disease that thins and weakens bones to the point where they break easily, especially bones in the hip, backbone (spine) and wrist. It is called the ‘silent disease’ as you may not notice any changes until a bone breaks though the bones have been losing strength for years.

Bone is living tissue. To keep the bones strong, the body is always breaking down old bone and replacing it with new tissue. As people enter their forties and fifties more bone is broken down than is replaced.



Women are at greater risk of Osteoporosis especially as they get older. When a woman approaches her late thirties bone loss may begin slowly. When they reach menopause women tend to lose bone quickly for several years. After this the bone loss may continue more slowly.

In men the loss of bone mass may occur more slowly but by the age of 65 - 70 men and women tend to be losing bone mass at the same rate.

Women who are at greater risk of getting Osteoporosis:

- Women over 65
- Have not gotten enough calcium throughout their lives
- Had an early menopause
- Women who have had a total or even sub-total hysterectomy
- Post-menopausal sedentary women
- Women who are heavy smokers, have a high caffeine intake or have low body weight

Warning signs of Arthritis

- Swelling in one or more joints
- Stiffness around the joints that lasts for at least one hour in the early morning
- Constant or recurring pain or tenderness in a joint
- Difficulty using or moving a joint normally
- Warmth and redness in a joint

If any of these symptoms last longer than two weeks, it is advised you visit a doctor.

Managing Arthritis

Rest, exercise, a healthy well-balanced diet and learning the right way to use your joints are key parts of any arthritis treatment program. Improving the way you use your joints through rest, exercise and keeping your weight down will help you control the pain. Ibuprofen can help you manage the pain as it is an anti-inflammatory drug that helps reduce the swelling.

Exercise is key to managing arthritis symptoms. Daily exercise, such as walking or swimming helps to keep joints moving, reduces pain and strengthens muscles around the joints.



Helpful Herbs

Cat's claw is helpful for relieving arthritis pain. Fever-few and ginger are also good for pain and soreness. Ginger is a powerful antioxidant that has anti-inflammatory effects.

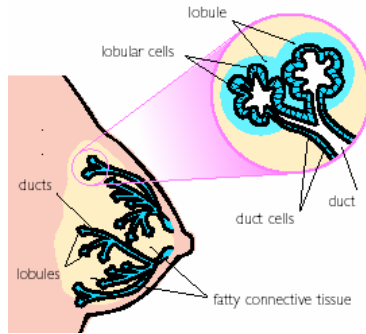
Wild yam can be used to prepare a tea to relieve the pain of arthritis and rheumatism.

The boiled leaves of Contra Hierba and Santa Maria plants can be used as a tincture to rub on the areas affected by arthritis.

Breast Cancer

What is Breast Cancer?

Cancer is a disease where cells grow out of control and invade, erode and destroy normal tissue. The breast is made up of millions of cells. Breast cancer develops when a single cell begins to multiply out of control and forms a tumour.



What affects your risk of getting breast cancer?

You are more at risk of getting breast cancer if:	You are less at risk of breast cancer if:
You have a family history of breast cancer. Your risk is greater if a close relative had breast cancer before age 50 or if two or more close relatives have been affected.	You have had children before the age of 25.
You started your periods before age 9 or the menopause after 55.	You started your periods at a late age or had an early menopause.
If you have taken hormone replacement therapy (HRT) in the form of estrogen replacement therapy.	You maintain a healthy diet (see section on nutrition page 15).
You have taken the contraceptive pill as it may cause a small increase in risk.	You exercise one to three hours a week.
You are overweight after the menopause as body fat affects hormone levels.	You have breastfed your children.

Changes in a woman's body:
Some women find their bodies change around the time of the menopause. With age, waists thicken, muscle mass is lost, fat tissue may increase and skin may get thinner. Other women experience memory problems or joint and muscle stiffness and pain.

Changes in your period:
Many women's menstrual cycles change their patterns with the menopause. Your period may come less often or more often. The flow may become heavier or lighter and spotting in between periods may occur.

Sex:
It is not uncommon to find that your feelings towards sex can change with the menopause. Changes in the vagina can make sex painful for some women. While other women feel freer and sexier, relieved that pregnancy is no longer a worry.

Mood Changes:
Some women find that while they go through the menopause they will experience mood changes due to the change in estrogen levels.

SIGNS OF MENOPAUSE

Problems with your vagina and bladder:
The genital area can get drier and thinner as estrogen levels change. Dryness may make sexual intercourse painful. Vaginal problems can make it hard to hold urine long enough to get to the bathroom.

Hot flashes:
A sudden feeling of heat in the upper part or all of your body. It may be as mild as a light blush or as severe enough to wake you up.

Sleep problems:
Some women have found that they have trouble getting a good nights sleep while going through the menopause.

Remember that until you have had one full year without a period you should still use birth control if you do not want to become pregnant.

Menopause

The menopause is marked by a woman's last menstrual period. You cannot know for sure what is your last period until you have not had a period for a full year.

Perimenopause is the time when a woman's body is close to menopause. Women's periods may become less regular and she may start to feel menopausal symptoms for example hot flushes and night sweats. The transition usually begins two to four years before your last menstrual period and lasts for about one year after your last period.

Post-menopause follows the menopause and lasts the rest of your life. This is when pregnancy is no longer possible. There may be some symptoms such as vaginal dryness which may continue long after you the menopause has passed.

There are two important changes that you may not notice but should be aware of when the menopause happens :

- 1) Loss of bone tissue which can weaken your bones and cause osteoporosis
- 2) The risk of heart disease ,may grow, due to age-related increases in weight, blood pressure and cholesterol levels

Hysterectomy

A hysterectomy is the removal of the uterus and often both ovaries. If a women has a hysterectomy and the ovaries are removed the body will no longer produces estrogen and so a woman will start the menopause.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

As you approach menopause you are faced with the decision whether or not to opt for some form of hormone therapy, whether it is hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or estrogen replacement therapy (ERT) only. You do as much research as possible before deciding whether to take hormone therapy and if so what type.

Early Detection

a) Breast Self Examinations

The best defense is early detection, as it is the best hope for a cure. Breast self examinations (BSE) is an important way to find breast cancer early. Not every cancer can be found this way, but it is a critical step you can and should take for yourself.

Belize Family Life Association (BFLA) carry out breast examinations for a fee of \$5.00 and there is a clinic in every district. They recommend that everyone over 40 should attend an annual exam and if they detect any abnormalities they will make an immediate referral.

b) Mammograms

A mammogram is an examination that can detect breast cancer in its earliest stages. It is the most effective and non-invasive means available for examining the breast. A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast when compressed. The breast is compressed in order to obtain the best detail. The compression is uncomfortable but not painful and will only last for a second.

Once a women reaches 50 a yearly mammogram is advised.

Women who have a lump, persistent pain or nipple discharge and any woman who is in the high risk group, should seek medical advice immediately. A lump in the breast does not necessarily mean cancer as they are often benign cysts, which can be reduced with the appropriate medication.

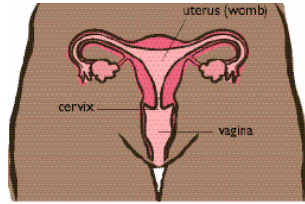
You can get a mammogram at the following places:

- Belize Diagnostic Centre - Cost \$110
- Universal Health Care Services - Cost \$109
- Belize Medical Association - Cost \$92.66

Cancer of the reproductive system

The female reproductive system

- The **uterus** is the largest organ in the female reproductive system. In a normal pregnancy, the foetus develops within the uterus, stretching it to many times its normal size
- The **cervix** is a very strong muscle that connects a woman's womb and her vagina.
- The **ovaries** contain unfertilised eggs. When one of these eggs unites with a man's sperm, it is fertilized and produces a child.



Cancer of the reproductive system

The most common types of cancer of the reproductive system are cervical, ovarian and cancer of the uterus. Cancer of the uterus and womb both have similar symptoms and risk factors. The risks and symptoms of cervical cancer are slightly different. There is a strong indication that cervical cancer is linked to an infection that is transmitted sexually.

You are at an increased risk of cancer of the ovaries or womb if:

- * You have a family history of ovarian, breast or bowel cancer
- * You have completed the menopause
- * You never had children

Signs and symptoms of these cancers include:

- * Prolonged swelling of the abdomen or pain in abdomen
- * Abnormal vaginal bleeding
- * Weight loss
- * Frequent need to urinate

Though in most cases it is unlikely to be cancer, you should visit the doctor if you notice any of the above signs and ask for a pelvic examination.

Nutrition

It is very important to eat healthy not just in old age but throughout your life as it can help prevent some of the health issues that are more prominent in your older years. By eating a healthy diet you should help to reduce the chance of becoming ill.

The five food groups provide a simple system for selecting a range of foods that will meet the daily nutrient requirements. Grouping is based on the main distinguishing nutrients found in these foods. You should eat more of those foods belonging to the bottom of the pyramid and less of the foods belonging to the top.



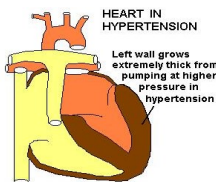
Older people need the same amount of nutrients but fewer calories as the rate at which the body uses energy tend to decrease. Some people maintain old eating habits not realizing that most people gain weight as they age.

Benefits of Good Nutrition:

- ◆ Have adequate energy to carry out daily tasks
- ◆ Enjoy good mental health and mental functions/capacities
- ◆ Be resistant to disease
- ◆ Quicker recovery from illnesses accidents or surgeries
- ◆ Be better able to manage chronic health problems, which in turn will improve quality of life, mobility and independence
- ◆ Maintains a balanced digestive system and ensures harmony within your body
- ◆ Have a more youthful appearance

Hypertension

High blood pressure (hypertension) is a condition commonly associated with narrowing of the arteries. This causes blood to be pumped with excessive force against the artery walls. It is a sign that the heart and blood vessels are being overworked. Untreated, high blood pressure will cause the heart to eventually overwork itself to the point where serious damage can occur.



Hypertension was once thought of as a “man’s disease”. In fact women are nearly as likely to suffer from this condition as men. More women than men die from complications of hypertension because women and to some extent their medical parishioner often ignore or fail to detect their high blood pressure until it is too late. Most cases of high blood pressure have no cure, but the overwhelming majority can be managed and controlled with diet and medication.

Hypertension Facts:

- You may not feel sick but it is serious and you need to see a doctor to treat it
- You can lower your blood pressure by changing your daily habits and if needed by taking medicine

Preventing and controlling hypertension:

- Keep a healthy weight
- Exercise each day
- Eat a well balanced, low-fat diet
- Cut down on salt will help lower your blood pressure
- Drink less alcohol as it can affect your blood pressure.
- Take your hypertension medicine as your doctor directs.



Testing for hypertension

If you think you have hypertension you should have your blood pressure tested at your doctors or local hospital.

What affects your risks of getting cervical cancer?

- **Not attending screening:** If you do not go for a Pap smear doctors will not be able to find and treat any early changes in your cervix which could then develop into cervical cancer.
- **Smoking:** Smoking doubles your risk of developing cervical cancer. This is because the chemicals in cigarettes can affect cells in the cervix.
- **Early sexual activity:** Having first sexual intercourse at an early age increases your risk since immature cells seem to be more susceptible to pre-cancerous changes.
- **Number of sexual partners:** You may be at greater risk of developing cancer if you have a number of sexual partners because you increase the risk of developing a sexually transmitted disease (STD). There are some STDs that are only detectable by cervical screening.
- **Unprotected sex:** Condoms protect against many STDs and therefore may protect you against the STD which is linked to cervical cancer.
- **A weakened immune system:** If your immune system is weak, it is harder for your body to get rid of an STD therefore you may be unable to get rid of the STD infection that is linked to cervical cancer.

Pap Smears

A Pap smear checks the health of the cervix. It helps doctors find changes in the cervix before they develop into cancer. It is important for all women to make Pap smears a part of their routine healthcare even once they have been through the menopause.

Where can I get a Pap smear / pelvic examination?

A Pap smear can be done as part of a pelvic examination. The Belize Family Life Association (BFLA) clinics carry out Pap smears in their clinics at a cost of \$32.70. Phone your local branch to find out when the next Pap smear clinic is.

Diabetes

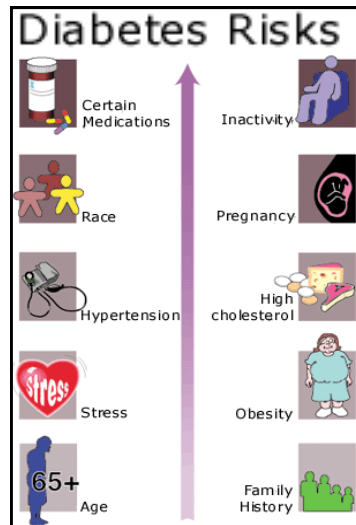
What is type two diabetes?

Type two diabetes is most common in adults over 40. It occurs when the cells do not use insulin properly and the pancreas is not producing enough insulin. It is linked to obesity, inactivity and family history of diabetes. People with diabetes do not make or properly use insulin. Therefore glucose builds up in the blood and causes many symptoms of diabetes.

Symptoms of type two diabetes

Some people with diabetes feel “run down” or have symptoms that may go unrecognized. Other symptoms may include:

- Feeling thirsty
- Urinating frequently
- Loosing weight
- Feeling tired
- Having blurred vision
- Getting skin infections
- Having slow healing cuts



Getting tested for diabetes

If you suspect that you are diabetic you should go for a blood test.

- Your local hospital offer diabetes testing for a charge of \$5.00. You should phone to find out when their clinics are
- Universal Health Care Services - Cost \$13.08
- Belize Medical Associates - Cost \$10.90
- Mercy Care Center, Belize Family Life Association and The Red Cross offer diabetes tests when they have the equipment available to do so. It is advised that you telephone your local branches

How do you get HIV?

HIV usually comes from having unprotected sex, sharing needles with an infected person or through contact with HIV infected blood.

No matter what your age you may be at risk if:

- You are sexually active and do not use a latex or polyurethane condom. You can get HIV/AIDS from having sex with someone who has HIV. The virus passes from the infected person to their partner in their blood, semen and vaginal fluid. During sex, HIV can get into your body through an opening, such as a tear or cut in the lining of the vagina, vulva, penis, rectum or mouth
- You do not know your partner’s drug and sexual history. Though it may be hard to do, it is very important to ask your partner about their sexual history and drug use

What does an HIV test involve?

A blood sample is taken and the test detects antibodies to HIV, which usually develop within six weeks to six months after exposure. If you have had unprotected sex during the six month period before you get tested, you could still be infected with HIV and have a negative test result. Some clinics are starting to use rapid HIV tests where you can get results within an hour. However, if you get a positive test result through a rapid test, you need to get another test to confirm these results, which could take about a week or two.

All HIV tests are confidential

Where to go to get an HIV test

- HIV tests are available from District Hospitals and health centers
- Belize Family Life Association offer free HIV tests, to find out on which days testing is carried out in you area phone your local branch
- Universal Health Care Services - Cost \$33.60
- Belize Medical Association - Cost \$35.34



HIV and AIDS



HIV/AIDS in Belize

Belize has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS in Central America and the 4th highest in all of Latin America. Since the first case was reported in Belize in 1986 there have been 2,928 cases of infection reported and 550 deaths. AIDS was ranked the 8th leading cause of death in 1999 and moved to 4th in 2000. If this trend continues it may soon be the leading cause of death in Belize.

HIV/AIDS and Older Women

In 2003, 3,500 adults aged 15-49 were living with HIV. Of those 37% were women, There are no figures available for adults over the age of 49. This does not mean that people over the age of 49 are not living with HIV/AIDS or are not vulnerable to becoming infected.

About HIV/AIDS

Anyone at any age can get HIV/AIDS. HIV is a virus that damages the immune system (the system your body uses to fight off diseases). HIV infection leads to a much more serious disease called AIDS. When the HIV infection gets in your body, your immune system weakens. This puts you in danger of getting other life-threatening diseases, infections and cancers. When this happens you have AIDS. If you think you have HIV, it is very important you get tested.

FACTS

- You **cannot** get HIV through casual contact such as shaking hands or hugging a person with HIV/AIDS
- You **cannot** get HIV from using a public telephone, drinking fountain, restroom or swimming pool
- You **cannot** get HIV from sharing a drink
- You **cannot** get HIV from being coughed or sneezed on by a person with HIV/AIDS
- You **cannot** get HIV from a mosquito.

Suggested treatments:

Diabetes cannot be cured but it can be controlled. Good control requires a careful blend of diet, exercise, blood sugar monitoring and medication:

- **Diet** is very important to lowering blood glucose levels
- **Exercise** helps the body burn of some of the excess glucose as energy. Exercising regularly has been shown to improve blood glucose levels in older people.
- **Drugs** may not be needed for type 2 diabetes if good control can be achieved through diet and exercise. When this fails, oral drugs, insulin or a combination of the two may be prescribed.
- **Foot care** is very important. Diabetes can lower blood supply to the limbs and reduce feeling in the feet. You should check your feet every day and watch for any redness or patches of heat. Sores, blisters, breaks in the skin, infections or buildup of calluses should be reported immediately to a doctor.
- **Skin care** is important as being diabetic you may have more injuries and infections. You should protect your skin by keeping it clean, use skin moisturizers to treat dryness and take care of minor cuts and bruises.
- **Teeth and gums** need special attention to avoid serious infection.

Diabetes is a self help disease. If you take steps to control your diabetes you can make a big difference in your health. Strict blood glucose control is your best defense



Helpful Herbs



Garlic decreases and stabilizes blood sugar levels, enhances immunity and improves circulation which are important if you are a diabetic.

Various wild herbs such as sorosi, trumpet tree and wild yam can be used as a blood tonic if drunk as a tea.