

Type 2 Diabetes & why Nicaraguans don't eat better

Type 2 Diabetes is a growing concern for the poor in Nicaragua: it is now the fourth leading cause of death of Nicaraguan women...mainly because of lack of medical attention. It either goes undiagnosed, or women do not have access to needed medications.

One in ten adults has type 2 diabetes in Nicaragua. Within ten years, it is estimated that 4 out of 10 adults will have type 2 diabetes...40% of the adult population.

Why? There are multiple causes. The first cause is that poverty leads to malnourishment as children.* When children do not get enough calories or the proper nutrition, then their bodies develop in such a way to hoard what nutrition they do get. When they become adults their bodies are still hoarding...which makes fat. Most of the fat settles around their torsos because Nicaraguans use their legs to walk everywhere, they use their arms for washing clothes, chopping wood, carrying heavy loads, etc. The fat settles in the worst place: around the middle, which increases the chances of type 2 diabetes.

Secondly Nicaraguans put on weight because of *what* they eat.

What do they eat? Rice, lots of rice. Corn tortillas, lots of tortillas. Some beans. Plantains. Little chicken. Some eggs and farmer's cheese...all cooked with oil and salt. Sometimes soup with little meat but lots of yucca or potatoes. Maybe cabbage and tomato salad. They drink coffee with sugar, sodas, and refresco (watered down fruit pulp and juice with lots of sugar) Notice anything? Oil and carbohydrates and sugars.



Cooking plantains loaded with oil and salt.

Why don't they eat better? Well let's compare prices:

- A pound of rice costs \$0.48 while a pound of chicken costs \$1.36
- A pound of beans cost \$0.52 to a pound of fish \$0.70 (this is cheap fish with the head and all)
- 4 plantains cost \$0.96 to 4 small heads of broccoli \$4.00
- 12 tortillas cost \$0.96 to 12 eggs \$1.92
- 1 liter of regular oil is \$1.40 while olive oil is \$9.35
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This is what they eat...what they drink is loaded with sugar.

Soda is \$0.32 (diet soda is \$1.00/can) and bottled clean water is at least \$0.80...*Coke is literally cheaper than water.* In the rural areas many grow enough coffee for themselves and in cities instant coffee is cheap, always drunk with lots of sugar...and most importantly sugar is only \$0.36 a pound. 36. Cents. A. Pound. Sugar is a cheap source of calories to keep going with all the hard labor.

And when your life is spent in a one room house with a dirt floor, 2 light bulbs, maybe a radio or TV, and life is one struggle after another, then adding some sweetness...or a lot of sweetness because sugar is so very cheap...well it makes life a little more tolerable. In other words...why is type 2 diabetes growing so rapidly in Nicaragua?

Poverty. *World Vision says 40% of Nicaraguan children are malnourished.

-Kathleen

Kathleen works with the Center for Development in Central America. Her blog can be found at www.jhc.org. The Center for Development in Central America (CDCA) is a non-profit organization seeking to address human needs created by poverty in the Western Hemisphere's second poorest nation by helping communities become self-sufficient, sustainable, democratic entities; by working with Nicaraguan communities to help them realize their own goals, rather than bringing in "ready-made solutions."