By masking it with terms such as “thick”, “shapely” and “big-boned”, we as African-Americans have found numerous ways to glorify obesity. We’ve fallen into the mindset that Blacks are supposed to be big and to be skinny or petite means that you aren’t “shaped like a black girl.” Unfortunately being “shaped like a black girl” also means that you have shaped your life to include increased health-care costs, reduced quality of life, and increased risk for premature death from coronary heart disease, hypertension, stroke and our focus today: DIABETES.

Over seventeen million Americans have diabetes. Almost 6 million Americans are unaware they have the disease. There are two main types of diabetes. Both types are caused by problems in how a hormone called insulin (that helps regulate blood sugar) works. Type 1 diabetes most often appears in childhood or adolescence and causes high blood sugar when your body can't make enough insulin. Over 90% of all diabetes cases are what we call type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes is usually diagnosed after age forty; however, it is now being found in all ages including children and adolescents. Type 2 diabetes is linked to obesity and physical inactivity. In this form of diabetes your body makes insulin but can't use its insulin properly. At first, your body overproduces insulin to keep blood sugar normal, but over time this causes your body to lose its ability to produce enough insulin to keep blood sugar levels in the normal healthy range. The result is sugar rises in your blood to high levels. Over a long period of time, high blood sugar levels and diabetes can cause heart disease, stroke, blindness, kidney failure, leg and foot amputations, and pregnancy complications. Diabetes can be a deadly disease; over 200,000 people die each year of diabetes-related complications.

Carrying extra body weight and body fat go hand-in-hand with the development of type 2 diabetes. People who are overweight are at much greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes than normal-weight individuals. Being overweight puts added pressure on the body's ability to properly control blood sugar using insulin and therefore makes it much more likely for you to develop diabetes. Almost 90% of people with type 2 diabetes are overweight or obese.

The good news is type 2 diabetes is largely preventable. Lifestyle changes including diet and moderate-intensity physical activity (such as walking for 150 minutes per week), and small amounts of weight loss in the range of 5-10% can prevent or delay the development of type 2 diabetes among high-risk adults. Managing your weight is the best thing you can do to prevent the development of diabetes. African Americans, however, have a higher incidence of diabetes and obesity.

DIABESITY
Like we mentioned before, diabetes and obesity are very closely related and a new term, DIABESITY, has been developed that refers to obesity-induced diabetes. Diabesity is a condition of metabolic imbalance and disease that varies from mild blood sugar imbalance to full-blown diabetes. Unfortunately, diabesity, in its numerous forms, affects more than one billion people worldwide. It is also the leading cause of most chronic disease, and those with this condition are at an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, dementia, cancer, high blood pressure, blindness, and kidney failure. In 60-70% of people, nervous system damage occurs and can lead to a loss of sensation in the hands and feet, slow digestion of food in the stomach, sexual dysfunction, carpal tunnel syndrome, and other nervous system problems.

This is a very serious condition and currently, conventional treatments usually do not work to treat it. I’m sure you are probably wondering why there is no effective treatment for this but there are effective treatments for diabetes. This is because the focus is on treating the symptoms (high blood sugar, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and blood that is too sticky and likely to clot) or risk factors of the disease rather than the underlying cause, which is insulin resistance.

Insulin resistance occurs when your diet is full of empty calories and has an abundance of quickly absorbed sugars, liquid calories and carbohydrates. When this happens, your cells slowly become resistant to the effects of insulin. You need more and more to do the same job of keeping your blood sugar even. Thus, you develop insulin resistance. High insulin levels are the first sign of a problem. The higher your insulin levels are, the worse your insulin resistance. As your insulin levels increase it leads to an appetite that is out of control, increasing weight gain around the belly, and more inflammation. As a result, your body starts to age and deteriorate. In fact, insulin resistance is the single-most important phenomena that lead to rapid and premature aging and all its resultant diseases.

DIABESITY and the REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

Studies have also shown that both diabetes and obesity greatly affect your reproductive system and reduce your ability to spontaneously conceive. Overweight women often have menstrual irregularity and do not ovulate more often than women with a normal BMI. Obese women are also at risk for multiple pregnancy-related disorders including gestational diabetes, pre-eclampsia, increased rates of miscarriage, pregnancy-induced hypertension, thromboembolism, hemorrhage, sleep apnea and caesarean section. Babies of overweight and obese women are more likely to require intensive care following birth and are more likely to suffer from heart defects and obesity later in life.

Women suffering from diabetes have greater incidences of vaginal and urinary tract infections. Nerve damage because of diabetes can lead to reduced vaginal lubrication and decreased sexual energy in women, while men may experience erectile dysfunction, lack of libido and testosterone deficiency. Women with diabetes are also more likely to experience irregular menstrual cycles due to interactions between certain hormones that can lead to irregular bloods sugar levels. Babies born to mothers with uncontrolled blood sugar levels may be born prematurely, or may suffer from seizures or stroke. Another problem that diabetic mothers may face is that the baby may grow too large and cause discomfort to the mom and complicate the delivery for both the mother and the baby.

DIABESITY CLUES
The truth is the road to diabetes starts as early as childhood. By the time you get diagnosed with diabetes you have had problems with insulin and blood sugar that could have been detected twenty to thirty years earlier.

Insulin resistance and diabesity are often accompanied by:

- Belly fat
- Fatigue after meals
- Sugar cravings
- High triglycerides
- Low HDL
- High blood pressure
- Problems with blood clotting
- Increased inflammation

These clues can often be picked up long before you ever get diabetes and may help you prevent the disease entirely. The real solution for diabesity is a comprehensive diet and lifestyle program. By applying this new form of medicine to your health problems you may overcome diabesity and become vibrantly healthy once again.