

5% of people with Type 2 diabetes achieve remission

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Up to one in 20 people with Type 2 diabetes will achieve remission from the disease and its symptoms, a study published Tuesday by PLOS Medicine found.

Of more than 162,000 adults age 30 and older in Scotland who had been diagnosed with the disease, just over 7,700 were in remission at the time the study was conducted in 2019, the data showed. This suggests people with Type 2 diabetes are achieving remission without participating in clinical trials of new treatments and low-calorie diets or undergoing weight loss surgery, the researchers said.

“We have been able to show, for the first time, that one in 20 people in Scotland with Type 2 diabetes achieve remission,” study co-author Dr. Mireille Captieux said in a press release.

“This is higher than expected and indicates a need for updated guidelines to support clinicians in recognizing and supporting these individuals,” said Captieux, a general practitioner and research fellow at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland.

About 30 million people in the United States have Type 2 diabetes, which is caused by the body’s inability to process sugars, causing elevated levels in the blood, according to the American Diabetes Association.

People with a family history of the disease, as well as those with poor diets and who are overweight, are at increased risk for developing it during their lifetimes, the association said.

Historically, Type 2 diabetes has been considered a chronic, progressive disease, meaning there is no cure and the symptoms usually worsen over time, it said.

However, recent research suggests remission — or having healthy blood sugar, or A1C, levels for at least two months, even after discontinuing insulin and other drugs — is possible, particularly if those with the disease eat a healthy diet and lose weight.

That is why weight-loss, or bariatric, surgery in which the size of the stomach is reduced to alter gut hormone levels and reduce appetite, has been linked with remission from Type 2 diabetes, according to the National Institutes of Health.

Still, the new findings from Scotland suggest that remission from Type 2 diabetes is more common than previously thought, given that earlier studies suggest less than three in 1,000 people with the disease achieve remission.

For this study, Captieux and her colleagues used a national register of people with Type 2 diabetes in Scotland to estimate how many people were in remission in 2019.

Of 162,316 people age 30 years and older who were eligible for the analysis, 7,710, or around 5 percent, were in remission in 2019, the data showed.

Those in remission tended to have not previously taken glucose-lowering medications, have lost weight since their Type 2 diabetes diagnosis, be older, have lower blood sugar levels at diagnosis and have had bariatric surgery, the researchers said.

Understanding how many individuals are in remission as well as their characteristics and following their progress could lead to improved initiatives to help others achieve it, Captieux said.