

The Facts about Diabetes

When to seek immediate medical attention if you have diabetes

Call 911 or go to the emergency room if you have the symptoms below. These may be **signs of ketoacidosis.**

- Abdominal pain
- Deep and rapid breathing
- Increased thirst and urination
- Loss of consciousness
- Nausea
- Sweet-smelling breath

Call 911 or go to the emergency room if you have the symptoms below. These may be **signs of extremely low blood sugar.**

- Confusion
- Convulsions or unconsciousness
- Dizziness
- Double vision
- Drowsiness
- Headache
- Lack of coordination
- Weakness

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease that affects how your body makes and reacts to insulin. Insulin is a hormone that is made in the pancreas to help lower blood sugar (also called blood glucose). With diabetes the pancreas does not make enough insulin or cells in the body do not respond to insulin like they should. This causes the blood sugar to be high.¹

What are the major types of diabetes?

There are 3 major types of diabetes: type 1 diabetes, type 2 diabetes, and gestational diabetes.

- ❖ **Type 1 diabetes** occurs when your body makes little or no insulin. This problem is usually discovered in childhood, but not always. Daily insulin shots are needed to treat type 1 diabetes. The cause is not known exactly, but family history may play a role.¹
- ❖ **Type 2 diabetes** develops when the pancreas quits making enough insulin to properly control blood sugar. This problem usually starts in adulthood, but some kids are beginning to develop it too. It is becoming more common due to increasing obesity and lack of exercise. Type 2 diabetes is also called diabetes mellitus.¹
- ❖ **Gestational diabetes** is high blood sugar in women that occurs during pregnancy. This can increase the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and heart disease later in life.¹

Am I at risk for diabetes?

Risk factors for type 2 diabetes include increased body weight; not getting enough exercise; age over 45; a parent, brother, or sister with diabetes; heart disease; high cholesterol; gestational diabetes or delivery a baby more than 9 pounds; and polycystic ovary disease.¹

Pre-diabetes is when blood sugar levels are higher than normal, but not high enough to be considered diabetes. This condition often leads to type 2 diabetes, but it is possibly reversible. Getting enough exercise and eating healthy is very important if told you have pre-diabetes.²

How do I know if I have diabetes?

General **symptoms** of high blood sugar include blurry vision, excessive thirst, tiredness, frequent urination, hunger, and weight

loss.^{1,2} Symptoms will vary depending on the type of diabetes you have. Type 2 diabetes develops slowly, so you may not have any symptoms of high blood sugar. Type 1 diabetes usually develops quickly, so you will most likely notice symptoms.¹

Three different tests may be used to **diagnose diabetes**. One test is the fasting blood sugar test. In this test, your doctor will check your blood sugar after you have been fasting overnight. This test has to be done twice to diagnose diabetes.² Another test is the random blood glucose test. In this case, a blood sugar will be checked without fasting. This test must be backed up with a fasting blood sugar test.¹ There is also an oral glucose tolerance test. This test involves drinking a sugary solution and testing your blood sugar afterward. This test is used often to detect gestational diabetes and also needs to be backed up with a fasting blood sugar test.² Your doctor may also do a blood test called a hemoglobin A₁C test. This does not diagnose diabetes, but it can tell if your blood sugar level has been increased over the previous two months.²

How is diabetes treated?

Treatment depends on the type of diabetes a person has. It may consist of a special diet, insulin shots, or pills to control your blood sugar.¹ To help prolong life, reduce symptoms, and prevent complications of diabetes, self blood sugar testing, exercise, a healthy diet, proper foot care, and understanding what diabetes is all about is also very important.

What are the complications of diabetes?

Some complications of diabetes will develop quickly, and others develop much later. Some of the early complications include high blood sugar and high ketones in the urine. The complications that develop later can include: heart disease, stroke, nerve damage, kidney damage, eye damage (including blindness), foot damage, skin and mouth problems, and bone and joint problems.^{2, 3}

The good news is that there are ways to prevent these complications. Some important ways to prevent complications include maintaining a good blood sugar, normal blood pressure and cholesterol control, and seeing a doctor to monitor your eyes, feet, and kidneys for potential problems.³ Talk to your doctor or a diabetes educator at least 4 times a year to discuss any problems.¹

Can diabetes be prevented?

Type 1 diabetes cannot be prevented. There are ways to prevent type 2 diabetes and gestational diabetes. These include eating healthy foods, like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and increasing physical activity to a goal of at least 30 minutes each day. If you are overweight, losing weight will help. Losing even 5% of your body weight can help reduce your risk for diabetes.²

For more detailed information online, visit the following websites:

1. American Diabetes Association at www.diabetes.org
2. Medline Plus www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001214.htm
3. WebMD <http://diabetes.webmd.com/>

References:

1. Diabetes [updated May 20, 2009]. Medline Plus. Available at: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/print/ency/article/001214.htm. Accessed October 15, 2009.
2. Mayo Clinic Staff. Diabetes [updated June 13, 2009]. Mayo Clinic Foundation for Medical Education and Research. Available at: www.mayoclinic.com/health/diabetes/DS01121. Accessed October 15, 2009.
3. National Diabetes Fact Sheet [updated 2007]. Available at: www.cdc.gov/diabetes/pubs/pdf/ndfs_2007.pdf. Accessed on October 15, 2009.