

# Diabetes: An Overview

## What is diabetes?

Having diabetes means that there is too much sugar (glucose) in your blood.

Your body breaks down some of the foods you eat into sugar. Your blood carries the sugar to the cells of your body. You need the sugar in your cells for energy, but too much sugar in your blood is not good for your health.

## What is the cause?

Diabetes is a problem with the way your body makes or uses insulin. Insulin is made by the pancreas, which is an organ in your upper belly. Your body uses insulin to help move sugar from the blood into the cells. When your body does not have enough insulin or has trouble using the insulin your body makes, sugar builds up in your blood and cannot get into your cells.

There are 3 main types of diabetes:

- **Type 1 diabetes** happens when your pancreas stops making insulin. This usually happens before the age of 35, but it can happen later. The exact cause is not known.
- **Type 2 diabetes** happens when your pancreas doesn't make enough insulin or your body is not able to use it well. This type of diabetes usually starts in adulthood. You have a higher risk of having type 2 diabetes if you have a family background of Alaska Native, American Indian, African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American, or Pacific Islander. Your risk is also increased if you have a family history of type 2 diabetes, don't get enough physical activity, or are overweight.
- **Gestational diabetes** can happen during pregnancy to women who have never had diabetes. The pregnancy hormones can interfere with the body's ability to use insulin. Gestational diabetes usually goes away after the baby is born, but the mother may have type 2 diabetes later in life.

## What are the symptoms?

Diabetes can be silent and may not cause any symptoms for months or even years. This is why it's so important to get your blood sugar checked as often as your healthcare provider recommends. The most common symptoms of diabetes include:

- Urinating a lot
- Increased thirst
- Increased hunger

Other symptoms may include:

- Blurry vision
- Dry mouth
- Tiredness

- Unexpected weight gain or loss
- Frequent infections—for example, of the skin, gums, bladder, or vagina
- Fruity-smelling breath
- Infections that heal slowly

Over time, high blood sugar damages the blood vessels. The parts most often affected are the eyes, heart, kidneys, and blood vessels to the feet and legs. The blood vessels to the brain can also be damaged. When the blood vessels are damaged, not enough blood gets to the body's organs and they stop working well. Once this happens, you may have poor vision or blindness, a heart attack, kidney failure, loss of feeling in your feet and legs, a stroke, or other problems.

## **How is it diagnosed?**

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and examine you. Your provider will also ask about your personal and family medical history. Your provider will test the level of sugar in your blood. Tests may include:

- Fasting blood sugar test (FBS). For this test, your blood sugar is tested in the morning before you have eaten anything. Two FBS tests may be needed for a diagnosis.
- Hemoglobin A1C. The A1C is a blood test that can be used to check your average blood sugar over the past 2 to 3 months.

## **How is it treated?**

The problems caused by diabetes can be delayed or prevented by taking good care of yourself. The goal of treatment is to keep the sugar level in a normal range. This is done with:

- Frequent checks of your blood sugar
- Good nutrition and meal planning
- Exercise
- Medicine, including pills or insulin, depending on the type of diabetes that you have and how well you are taking care of yourself

## **How can I help take care of myself?**

If you have diabetes, here are some things you can do to stay healthy:

- Eat healthy.
- Get regular exercise.
- Keep track of your blood sugar and keep it at the level your healthcare provider recommends.
- Follow your healthcare provider's directions for taking your medicine.
- Keep your blood pressure normal.
- Keep your cholesterol normal.
- Get your feet checked at every appointment with your healthcare provider.
- Prevent infection, especially in your feet.

- Get your eyes checked every year.
- Take care of your teeth and gums by getting regular dental check-ups.
- Don't smoke.
- Avoid stress or learn how to manage it.
- Keep your regular appointments with your healthcare provider.

Ask your healthcare provider:

- How and when you will hear your test results
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a regular checkup and when you should call your healthcare provider right away.

You can get more information about diabetes from:

- American Diabetes Association  
1-800-DIABETES (800-342-2383)  
<http://www.diabetes.org/>
- National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse  
<http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov>.

## **How can I help prevent diabetes?**

Type 1 diabetes cannot be prevented.

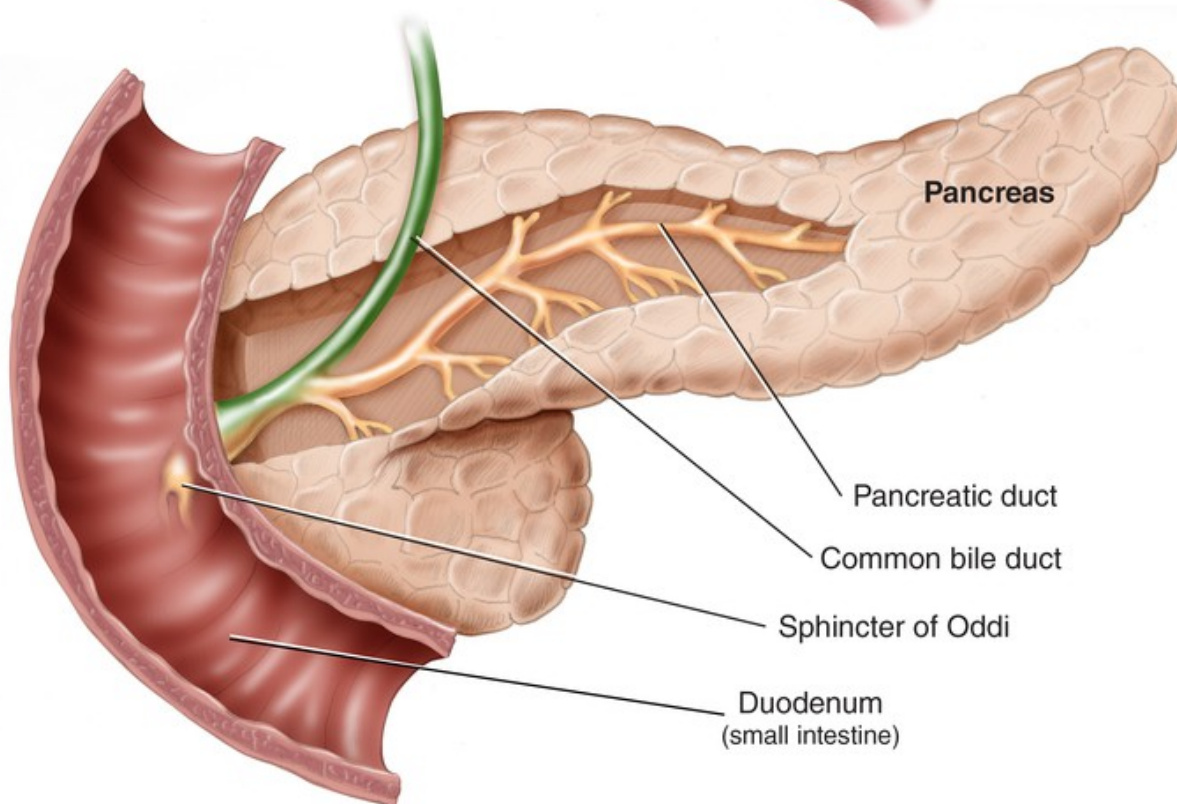
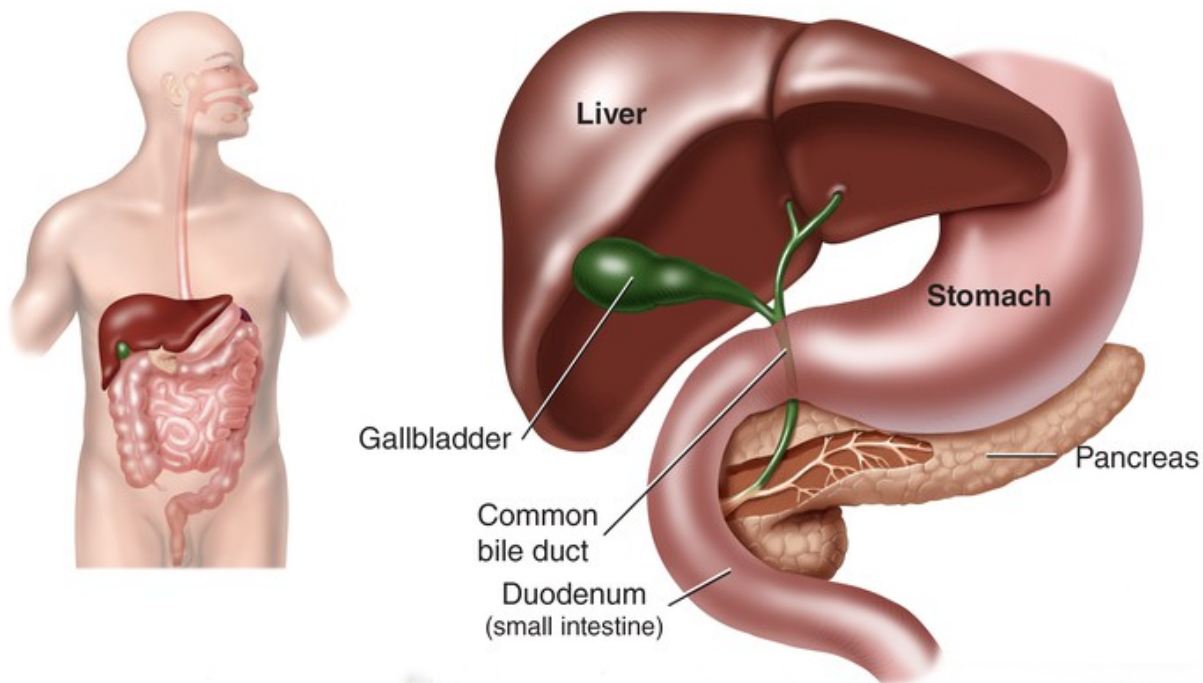
Prediabetes is a term used if your blood sugar is above normal but not yet high enough to be called diabetes. If you have prediabetes, you are at risk of having type 2 diabetes. Here are some things you can do to help keep from getting this disease:

- Eat healthy.
- Get regular exercise.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Get your blood sugar checked as often as your healthcare provider recommends.

Developed by RelayHealth.

*This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.*

# Pancreas



Copyright ©2014 McKesson Corporation and/or one of its subsidiaries. All rights reserved.