

Diabetes Type-2 Risk Factors and Warning Signs

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.

Diabetes is caused by 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 you do not have enough insulin or you have trouble using the insulin your body makes, sugar builds up in your blood and cannot get into your cells.

The 2 main types of diabetes are type 1 and type 2 diabetes.

- **Type 1 diabetes** happens when your pancreas stops making insulin. It usually starts before the age of 35.
- **Type 2 diabetes** happens when the body gradually loses its ability to use its own insulin or stops making enough insulin. It usually starts in adulthood but can also start when you are a child.

Doctors don't know how to prevent type 1 diabetes. However, type 2 diabetes, which is much more common than type 1, can often be prevented by controlling risk factors. You cannot change your family history or your age, but you can change your lifestyle. Choosing healthy foods, keeping a healthy weight, and getting regular exercise can keep you from developing type 2 diabetes.

What are the risk factors for type 2 diabetes?

Risk factors for type 2 diabetes that you cannot control include:

- A family history of diabetes
- A family background of Alaska Native, American Indian, African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American, or Pacific Islander
- Being older than 45 years old
- Gestational diabetes during pregnancy, or giving birth to a baby that weighed 9 pounds or more
- Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)

Risk factors that you may be able to control include:

- Your food choices
- Being overweight
- An inactive lifestyle with little or no exercise
- High blood pressure
- Unhealthy cholesterol levels

- A condition called prediabetes, which is defined by a fasting blood sugar between 100 and 125 mg/dL (5.5 to 6.9 mmol/L) or a hemoglobin A1C test result between 5.7 and 6.4%

What are the warning signs of diabetes?

One of the problems with type 2 diabetes is that it can be silent for months or years. That's why it's so important to be checked periodically if you are at risk. When diabetes does start to cause symptoms, common symptoms are:

- Feeling unusually thirsty
- Urinating a lot
- Unexpected weight gain or weight loss
- Tiredness
- Skin infections
- Slow healing of sores
- Blurry vision
- Repeated yeast infections of the vagina

Why is it important to prevent and treat diabetes?

Untreated diabetes can have serious consequences. Diabetes can damage small blood vessels and nerves, causing problems in the eyes, heart, brain, kidneys, skin, and feet. The risks for high blood pressure, a stroke, and problems with the heart and blood vessels are much higher for people with diabetes. The risks for loss of vision, even blindness, are also increased. Numbness and tingling in the hands and feet are common problems due to nerve damage. Men with diabetes may start having trouble with erections. If your blood sugar level gets too high, you may go into a coma or die.

How can I help myself?

- If you are over 40 years old--or younger if you are overweight--make sure your healthcare provider checks your blood sugar every year, especially if you have a family history of type 2 diabetes.
- Have regular medical checkups as often as your healthcare provider recommends. Don't wait for serious problems before making an appointment.
- Watch for the warning signs of diabetes.
- Eat a low-fat diet with lots of fruits, vegetables, fiber, and lean protein. Avoid the white foods, like sugar, white flour products (white bread, biscuits, pancakes, etc.), white potatoes, and white rice. Instead, eat whole grains--for example, whole wheat flour, bran, oatmeal, quinoa, brown rice. You may want to work with a dietitian to set up a diet program that meets your needs.
- Exercise regularly, according to your healthcare provider's recommendations.
- If you smoke, quit. Smoking worsens the effects of diabetes, creates blockages in the blood vessels, and increases your risk of complications.

- Keep your weight under control, particularly if you have a family history of diabetes.
- If you have already been diagnosed with diabetes or prediabetes and you have the symptoms or warning signs of diabetes, this means your blood sugar is not in good control. To avoid the complications of diabetes, you must see your healthcare provider and work with him or her to get your blood sugar back into the recommended range.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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