



Introduction to diabetes

If you are living with diabetes, you are not alone. About 34 million people in the U.S. are living with the condition, and there are about 1.5 million new diagnoses every year. Fortunately, new treatments, tools and lifestyle changes are helping people manage diabetes and live life to the fullest.

Alongside your medical team, Walgreens is here to support you. We created this pamphlet and others to help you better understand diabetes and give you tips and advice you can use every day. If you have any questions, just ask your Walgreens pharmacist or visit us at [Walgreens.com/Diabetes](https://www.walgreens.com/Diabetes).

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Diabetes defined

Diabetes refers to a group of conditions that affects how the body uses sugar in your blood (glucose) and causes it to rise to higher-than-normal levels. Insulin is a hormone that helps move sugar from the blood into the cells, where it's used for energy. Diabetes develops when the body doesn't make enough insulin or when it can't use insulin properly. Without enough insulin, sugar stays in the blood and rises to unsafe levels, which can lead to serious health complications if not controlled.

Type 1 diabetes

Previously known as juvenile diabetes or insulin-dependent diabetes, type 1 diabetes often starts in childhood or early adulthood but can develop at any age. In type 1 diabetes, the body makes little or no insulin. People living with type 1 diabetes must take insulin shots or wear an insulin pump every day to manage their blood sugar levels.

Type 2 diabetes

Referred to before as adult-onset diabetes, type 2 diabetes can start at any age. In type 2 diabetes, the body stops using insulin properly (known as insulin resistance) or doesn't make enough insulin. Between 90% and 95% of people with diabetes have type 2 diabetes, making it the most common form of the condition. Type 2 diabetes is treated with lifestyle changes, including weight loss, diet and exercise, and sometimes diabetes pills, insulin or other injectable medication.

Prediabetes

One of the biggest warning signs of type 2 diabetes is prediabetes, in which blood sugar levels are above normal but not high enough to be called diabetes. As with type 2 diabetes, the body might not be able to make enough insulin or the cells become insulin resistant. Because there are usually no noticeable symptoms, a blood test is the only way to know for sure if you are living with prediabetes.

Being diagnosed with prediabetes doesn't necessarily mean it will develop into type 2 diabetes. Healthy lifestyle changes, such as losing weight if you're overweight and getting regular physical activity, can lower the risk for type 2 diabetes and improve your overall health.

Gestational diabetes

Unique to pregnant women, gestational diabetes causes hormones to block the actions of insulin, which can result in dangerously high blood sugar levels. Gestational diabetes usually goes away after the baby is born, but women who have had the condition have a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Gestational diabetes can also cause problems with the pregnancy and can increase your baby's chances of developing type 2 diabetes in the future. Healthcare providers usually screen for gestational diabetes during weeks 24 to 28 of pregnancy.





Causes and risk factors of diabetes

The exact cause of type 1 diabetes is unknown, but it's believed to arise when a problem in the immune system causes immune cells to attack the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. Having a family history of type 1 diabetes puts people at higher risk of developing the disease. Environmental factors, such as viruses, also might trigger the immune system response.

Several factors seem to contribute to a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes, including:

- Having prediabetes
- Being overweight
- Being 45 years or older
- Having a parent, brother or sister with type 2 diabetes
- Being physically active less than three times a week
- Having had gestational diabetes or giving birth to a baby who weighed more than 9 lb.
- Having polycystic ovary syndrome
- Being African American, Hispanic/Latino American, American Indian or Alaska Native (some Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans are also at higher risk)

Symptoms of diabetes

Symptoms for both type 1 and type 2 diabetes can include:

- Frequent urination
- Increased thirst and hunger
- Feeling more tired than usual
- Blurry vision

People living with type 1 diabetes may also experience unexplained weight loss, while those with type 2 diabetes may feel tingling, pain or numbness in their hands and feet. In addition to having the same symptoms as adults, signs of diabetes in children can include fruity-smelling breath and unusual moodiness and restlessness.

There can be differences between type 1 and type 2 diabetes when symptoms first start. In type 1 diabetes, symptoms often come on quickly over a short time. In type 2 diabetes, symptoms may come on slowly over the course of many years and be mild, making them difficult to notice. Keeping up to date on your annual physicals with your doctor will help to identify early signs of diabetes.



Diabetes FAQs



1) Will my diabetes ever go away?

While there is no cure currently for the different forms of diabetes, losing weight, eating healthy food and being active can really help. Taking medication as needed, getting diabetes self-management education and support, and keeping healthcare appointments can also reduce the impact of diabetes on your life.

2) How often should I check my blood sugar?

You should work closely with your healthcare provider to determine how often you should be testing. The type of diabetes and diabetes medication you have may have an impact on your testing schedule. Typical times to check include:

- When you first wake up, before you eat or drink anything
- Before a meal
- Two hours after a meal
- At bedtime

If you have type 1 diabetes, have type 2 diabetes and take insulin, or often have low blood sugar, your healthcare provider may want you to check your blood sugar more often.

3) How is diabetes treated?

Type 1 diabetes is managed by insulin injections (or an insulin pump) that regulate blood sugar levels, as well as healthy lifestyle habits. These healthy habits can be important in controlling blood sugar as well as blood pressure and cholesterol.

Diabetes type 2 can be managed in a variety of ways. Some people are able to control it with diet and exercise, while others may need additional treatment with several oral and injectable medications. Oral medications can help the cells in your body accept insulin more easily, help the pancreas create more insulin, decrease the amount of glucose produced by the liver and help lower the amount of glucose in the blood.

4) What are some benefits of controlling diabetes?

A healthy lifestyle is the key to preventing or delaying complications. It is important to keep your blood sugar levels in your target range, which is set in discussions with your doctor, as much as possible to help prevent or delay long-term, serious health problems. Problems can include heart disease, vision loss and kidney disease. Staying in your target range can also help improve your energy and mood.



Diabetes FAQs (cont.)

5) What causes low blood sugar?

Low blood sugar (also called hypoglycemia) has many causes, including missing a meal, taking too much insulin, taking other diabetes medication, exercising more than normal and drinking alcohol. Blood sugar below 70 mg/dL is considered low. Signs of low blood sugar are different for everyone.

Common symptoms include:

- Shaking
- Sweating
- Nervousness or anxiety
- Irritability or confusion
- Dizziness
- Hunger

It's best to know what your individual symptoms are so you can catch low blood sugar early and treat it. If left untreated, hypoglycemia may lead to serious complications such as confusion, seizure or unconsciousness (passing out or coma) requiring emergency care.

6) How do carbohydrates affect blood sugar?

Carbohydrates, also known as carbs, in food make your blood sugar levels go higher than proteins or fats. You can still eat carbs if you have diabetes. The amount you can have while staying in your target blood-sugar range depends on your age, weight, activity level and other factors. Counting carbs in foods and drinks is an important way to manage blood sugar levels. You can count carbs by looking at food labels, researching online and by using carb-counting apps.

7) Can I just use medication alone to treat my diabetes?

Combining medication with a healthy, vegetable- and fruit-rich diet, weight management and regular physical activity can help you lower your risk of diabetes-associated complications. Making healthy lifestyle choices may even lower the amount of medication you have to take. This can result in fewer side effects and costs. Other tips include:

- Keep track of your blood sugar levels to see what makes them go up or down
- Eat at regular times, and do not skip meals
- Choose foods lower in calories, saturated fat, trans fat, sugar and salt
- Track your food, drink and physical activity
- Drink water instead of juice or soda
- Limit alcoholic drinks
- For a sweet treat, choose fruit



Control your food portions (for example, use the Diabetes Plate Method: Fill half your plate with nonstarchy vegetables, a quarter with lean protein and a quarter with a grain or starchy food).

Resources

- A snapshot: Diabetes in the United States. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site. <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/library/socialmedia/infographics/diabetes.html>. Reviewed February 18, 2020. Accessed December 1, 2020.
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