

# Diabetes

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Diabetes occurs when your blood levels of glucose, a form of sugar, are too high. Diabetes is a serious disease that can lead to other health problems.

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## What Is Diabetes?



Your body breaks down the foods you eat into sugar (known as glucose), which travels through the bloodstream to feed your cells. Your body also manufactures a hormone called insulin to help use this sugar for energy.

Diabetes keeps the body from producing insulin or affects how the body uses insulin. That means that if you have diabetes you have too much sugar in your blood.

If you do not get treatment diabetes can damage your blood vessels and harm your eyes, kidneys, and nerves. It can also cause heart disease, strokes, or even the need to remove all or part of a limb (amputation).

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## What Are the Types of Diabetes?

### Type 1

Type 1 diabetes is usually seen in children, teens, or adults under 30. Those with type 1 must take insulin every day.

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### Type 2

Type 2 diabetes is most common in people over age 40. With type 2 the body produces insulin but does not use it in the right way.

Causes of type 2 diabetes include obesity, lack of activity, a family history of diabetes, and ethnic background.

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### Pre-Diabetes

There is also a condition called pre-diabetes in which blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough to be called diabetes. This condition raises the risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

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## How Do I Know If I Have Diabetes?



There are few symptoms of type 2 diabetes, but there are some signs:

- Do you feel unusually tired and run down?
- Are you more hungry than usual?
- Are you more thirsty than usual?
- Have you lost a lot of weight?
- Do you have to urinate frequently?
- Has your vision become blurry for no real reason?
- Do you get skin infections easily?
- Are minor cuts and bruises slow to heal?

If you have experienced one or more of these signs, see a doctor and have yourself tested for diabetes.

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## What Will the Doctor Do?

Symptoms of diabetes occur when the problem is severe. A doctor can diagnose diabetes early by checking your blood glucose levels using two tests:

- **Fasting Plasma Glucose (FPG).** This measures your blood glucose level after eating or drinking nothing (fasting) for at least 8 hours, usually overnight.
- **Oral Glucose Tolerance Test.** Your blood glucose is checked, and then you drink a sugary beverage. Your blood glucose levels are checked each hour for 3 hours.

These tests can be repeated again on another day to confirm the diagnosis.

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## Why Is It Important to Find Diabetes Early?

Finding diabetes early is important because it can keep you from having more problems down the road. Once found, you can control diabetes to prevent complications like blindness, amputations, renal failure, heart disease, and stroke.

## What Can I Do If I Have Diabetes?



All of these conditions can be controlled with some lifestyle changes.

If you have been diagnosed with pre-diabetes, you can delay or prevent type 2 diabetes by losing weight and being more active. If you have type 1 or type 2 diabetes, use these steps to help control it.

- **Plan meals and eat correctly.** Different foods affect your glucose levels in different ways. Your doctor, or a dietician, can work with you to create a meal plan.
- **Be physically active.** Get involved in a regular fitness program to improve blood sugar levels. Your doctor can help plan an activity program that works for you.
- **Take medications.** Your doctor may prescribe oral medicines, insulin, or a combination of both as needed.
- **Monitor yourself.** Keep track of how well your diabetes care plan is working. Regularly check blood glucose levels, and monitor your blood pressure and cholesterol.

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## What Else Can I Do?

- **Eye exams.** Have an eye exam every year.
- **Kidney check.** Have a yearly urine test for a protein called albumin to see if your kidneys have been affected.
- **Foot care.** Check your feet every day. If anything unusual appears, see your doctor right away.
- **Care of teeth and gums.** Work closely with a dentist to maintain good oral health is very important.
- **Flu shots and pneumonia vaccine.** Get a yearly flu shot and a pneumonia vaccine at least every five years.
- **Skin care.** Protect your skin; keep it clean and moist. Also take care of cuts and bruises to prevent infections.

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**Resources**

**Organizations**

***American Diabetes Association***

1701 North Beauregard Street

Alexandria, VA 22311

Phone: (800) DIABETES (342-2383)

Web site: [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)

***Medicare***

Phone: (800) MEDICARE (633-4227)

*People with diabetes who are on Medicare now receive coverage for supplies such as glucose monitors, test strips, and lancets. Call Medicare for more information about what is covered.*

***National Diabetes Education Program***

One Diabetes Way

Bethesda, MD 20814-9692

Phone: (800) 438-5383

Web site: [www.ndep.nih.gov](http://www.ndep.nih.gov)

***National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse (NDIC)  
National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney  
Diseases***

One Information Way

Bethesda, MD 20892-3560

Phone: (800) 860-8747

Web site: [www.diabetes.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.diabetes.niddk.nih.gov)

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**Web Site**

[www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov)

*Up-to-date, quality health care information. Go to Health Topics, "Diabetes."*