

# Understanding Diabetes

## 1. What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a chronic (long-term) disease where the body doesn't make or properly use insulin. Insulin is a hormone in the body that helps control the amount of sugar (glucose) in your blood. A person with diabetes has too much sugar (glucose) in the blood. High levels of sugar cause damage to the blood vessels and nerves in the body. Over time, diabetes causes cardiovascular disease, heart attacks, strokes, kidney failure, blindness, neuropathy, disability and early death. There are four types of diabetes: Type 1, Type 2, Gestational, and Pre-diabetes.

## 2. What are the signs and symptoms of diabetes?

Finding diabetes early can prevent serious health problems. Most people have no symptoms until diabetes is severe and has already caused health problems. It's important to get tested for diabetes and treat it early. If you have any of these symptoms, see your doctor to get tested for diabetes:

- Blurry vision
- Frequent urination
- Increased thirst
- Extreme hunger
- Sores that heal slowly
- Tingling or numbness in hands or feet
- Increased tiredness
- Irritability
- Very dry skin
- Unusual weight loss
- Confusion
- Frequent infections

## 3. How do you manage diabetes?

Being overweight or obese causes diabetes. Losing weight helps prevent and control diabetes. Medicines and lifestyle changes are very important to control blood sugar levels and prevent health problems, disability, and early death. Everyone with pre-diabetes or diabetes should follow these lifestyle recommendations:

- Maintain a healthy weight and lose extra weight
- Eat healthy meals. Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables when you eat a meal.
- Exercise 40 minutes each day 3 to 4 times per week
- Check your blood sugar every day
- Check your feet for cuts, sores, blisters, or swelling
- Take your prescribed medicines to control your cholesterol, blood pressure and diabetes
- Follow your doctor's instructions about checking your blood sugar, both at home and in the office
- Get the flu vaccine every year and make sure you have received the pneumonia vaccine
- Cut down or quit smoking. For information about how to quit, call: 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669)



### Risk Factors

The following may increase your chances of getting diabetes:

- Family history
- Physical inactivity
- Overweight and obesity
- Age (45 or older)
- Women who developed diabetes while pregnant (gestational diabetes)
- Race (African American, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islanders)

### Types of Diabetes

**Type 1 diabetes:** When the body can't make its own insulin.

**Type 2 diabetes:** When the body can't properly use its own insulin.

**Gestational diabetes:** When your body develops high blood sugar during pregnancy. Usually, blood sugar returns to normal soon after delivery.

**Pre-diabetes:** When blood sugar levels are higher than normal, but not high enough to be diagnosed as Type 2 diabetes.

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