

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a problem with your body that causes blood glucose (also called blood sugar) levels to rise higher than normal. This is also called hyperglycemia.

When you eat, your body breaks food down into glucose and sends it into the blood. Insulin then helps move the glucose from the blood into your cells. When glucose enters your cells, it is either used as fuel for energy right away or stored for later use. In a person with diabetes, there is a problem with insulin. But, not everyone with diabetes has the same problem.

There are different types of diabetes—type 1, type 2, and a condition called gestational diabetes. If you have diabetes, your body either doesn't make insulin, can't use insulin it does make well, or both.

Diabetes may be treated with insulin, oral medications, exercise, and meal planning. If left untreated, diabetes can lead to several complications, such as nerve damage, kidney or eye problems, heart disease, and stroke. But, if managed well, you can live a long, healthy life with diabetes.

Type 1

In type 1 diabetes, your immune system mistakenly destroys the beta cells in your pancreas that make insulin. Your body treats beta cells as foreign invaders and destroys them. This can happen over a few weeks, months, or years.

When enough beta cells are gone, your pancreas stops making insulin, or makes so little insulin that you need to take insulin to live. Type 1 diabetes develops most often in young people but can appear in adults.

Type 2

If you have type 2 diabetes your body does not use insulin properly. This is called insulin resistance. At first, the beta cells make extra insulin to make up for it. But, over time, your pancreas can't make enough insulin to keep blood glucose at normal levels. Type 2 diabetes develops most often in middle aged and older adults but can appear in young people.

Some people with type 2 diabetes can manage their diabetes with healthy eating and exercise. However, your doctor may need to also prescribe oral medications (pills) and/or insulin to help you meet your target blood glucose levels.

Diabetes is a progressive disease. Even if you don't need to treat your diabetes with medications at first, you may need to over time.

Gestational diabetes

Gestational diabetes (GDM) is diabetes that develops during pregnancy. For most women, blood glucose levels will return to normal after giving birth. If you've had GDM you will need to be tested regularly since you are at much higher risk for developing type 2 diabetes later in life.



What is diabetes? (continued)

Warning Signs of Diabetes

The following symptoms are typical. However, some people with type 2 diabetes have symptoms so mild that they go unnoticed.

Common symptoms of diabetes include:

- Urinating often
- Feeling very thirsty
- Feeling very hungry even though you are eating more
- Extreme fatigue
- Blurry vision
- Cuts/bruises that are slow to heal
- Weight loss—even though you are eating more (type 1)
- Tingling, pain, or numbness in the hands/feet (type 2)



Diabetes Management

You will work with your health care team to make a plan that helps you reach your goals. Together, you'll keep track of the ABCs of diabetes:

A is for A1C: Your A1C check tells you your average blood glucose for the past 2 to 3 months.

B is for blood pressure: Your blood pressure numbers tell you the force of blood inside your blood vessels. When your blood pressure is high, your heart has to work harder.

C is for cholesterol: Your cholesterol numbers tell you about the amount of fat in your blood. Some kinds, like HDL cholesterol, help protect your heart. Others, like LDL cholesterol, can clog your blood vessels and lead to heart disease. Triglycerides are another kind of blood fat that raises your risk for a heart attack or stroke.