



What Is Diabetes and How Can I Manage It?

Diabetes is a condition that results in blood sugar rising to dangerous levels. Blood sugar, also called glucose, is controlled by insulin. Blood sugar is your main source of energy and comes mostly from the food you eat. Insulin is a hormone that helps your body's cells absorb the glucose from your blood and use it or store it for energy.

When you have diabetes, your body either doesn't make enough insulin or can't use its own insulin as well as it should, or both. This causes sugars to build up in your blood.



Between health care visits, you can monitor your blood sugar with a home glucose monitor.

What types of diabetes are there?

There are two main types of diabetes: Type 1 and Type 2.

Type 1 diabetes usually occurs in children and young adults. It happens when the body stops producing insulin. People with Type 1 diabetes must take insulin or other medications daily.

Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes. It most often appears in adults. It develops when the body doesn't use the insulin it makes efficiently. This is called **insulin resistance**. Also, the pancreas may not make enough insulin for the body's needs.

Prediabetes means that the body is having trouble getting your blood sugar numbers down to a healthy range, but it hasn't reached the level of Type 2 diabetes.

Am I at risk for Type 2 diabetes?

You're more likely to develop Type 2 diabetes if you:

- Are age 45 or older.
- Have a family history of Type 2 diabetes.
- Have prediabetes.
- Had gestational diabetes or gave birth to a baby over nine pounds.
- Have non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.

- Are overweight or obese.
- Don't get enough physical activity.
- Don't eat a healthy diet.

People in certain ethnic groups also seem to be more likely to develop Type 2 diabetes. These groups include African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, American Indians, Alaska Natives and Asian Americans.

How is it diagnosed?

Diabetes is diagnosed using one of three tests.

The most common test is the **HbA1C** (or A1C). It's used to diagnose and monitor diabetes. This test measures your average blood sugar level for the past two to three months. You may be diagnosed with diabetes if your A1C is 6.5% or above.

Another blood test is the **fasting plasma glucose test** (FPG). You can't eat or drink except for water for eight hours prior to the test. Normal glucose is less than 100 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL). Diabetes is diagnosed at 126 mg/dL or higher on at least two occasions.

An **oral glucose tolerance test** (OGTT) measures how well your body handles a standard amount of glucose.

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How can I manage diabetes and reduce my risk for heart disease and stroke?

Changing your habits is key in managing your diabetes and preventing heart disease and stroke. Medication may still be needed, but you can reduce your risk by taking these steps.

1. Control your diabetes.
2. Don't smoke and avoid second-hand smoke.
3. Control your blood pressure.
4. Improve your cholesterol.
5. Eat a heart-healthy diet.
6. Reach and maintain a healthy weight.
7. Be physically active.
8. Get enough sleep.
9. Manage stress and well-being.
10. Have regular medical check-ups.

You may need to check your sugar level daily and monitor your carbohydrate intake. You also may need medicines to help control your blood sugar or insulin levels. People newly diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes may be prescribed **metformin** as a first-line therapy in addition to lifestyle changes. It decreases the amount of glucose made in your liver.

If lifestyle changes and metformin aren't controlling your blood sugar well enough, additional medicines may be needed.



Following a heart-healthy eating plan is a great way to help manage your diabetes and reduce other risk factors.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721), or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families, at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

How often should I check my blood sugar?

Do I need to take insulin?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.