

What Is Diabetes and How Can I Control It?

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 too high in your blood. Most of the food you eat is turned into glucose, or sugar, for your body to use for energy. Insulin is a hormone needed to convert sugar and other food into energy and to help glucose get into your body's cells.



What types of diabetes are there?

This disease has two main forms: type 1 and type 2.

Type 2 is the most common. About 90 percent to 95 percent of Americans diagnosed with diabetes have type 2 diabetes. It most often develops in middle-aged and older adults. It's often linked with obesity and physical inactivity.

Type 2 diabetes develops when the body doesn't make enough insulin and doesn't efficiently use the insulin it makes (insulin resistance).

Type 1, or juvenile diabetes, usually starts early in life. It results from the body's failure to produce insulin. People with it must take insulin each day to regulate levels of blood glucose (sugar).

Am I at risk?

Diabetes is increasing. This is because more people are obese, don't get enough physical activity and are getting older. However, younger people are developing diabetes at an alarming rate. This is probably because obesity and lack of physical activity are increasing problems for this group, too.

People in several ethnic groups seem to be more likely to develop type 2 diabetes:

- Hispanics
- African Americans
- Native Americans
- Asians (especially South Asians)

How can I control my risk for heart disease and stroke?

Diabetes is a major risk factor for stroke and heart disease. That means it can be as serious as smoking, high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, physical inactivity or obesity.

If you have diabetes, it's very important to have regular check-ups. Work closely with your healthcare provider to manage your diabetes and reduce any other risk factors:

- Control your weight and blood cholesterol with a low-saturated-fat, low-cholesterol diet.
- Be physically active for at least 30 minutes on most or all days of the week.
- If you drink alcohol, don't have more than one drink per day for women or two per day for men.

- Lower your blood pressure, if it's too high. People with diabetes should keep blood pressure under 130/80 mm Hg.
- Don't smoke, and avoid other people's tobacco smoke.
- Specific medicines may help you control your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose.

Your doctor will advise you if one is right for you. If you take medicine, take it exactly as directed. If you have questions about the dosage or side effects, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit americanheart.org to learn more about heart disease.

3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit StrokeAssociation.org.

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

What are the warning signs of heart attack and stroke?

Warning Signs of Heart Attack

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- **Chest discomfort**
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body**
- **Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort**
- **Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness**

Warning Signs of Stroke

- **Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body**
- **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding**
- **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes**
- **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination**
- **Sudden, severe headache with no known cause**

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1 ... Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

Can diabetes be cured?

What type of diet would be most helpful?

Your contribution to the American Heart Association supports research that helps make publications like this possible.

The statistics in this sheet were up to date at publication. For the latest statistics, see the *Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update at americanheart.org/statistics.*

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