



Canada

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## Diabetes Basics

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### Diabetes is about INSULIN AND GLUCOSE

The body gets energy by making glucose (sugar) from foods like bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, milk and fruit. To use this glucose, the body needs insulin. Insulin is a hormone that helps control the level of glucose in blood. Diabetes is diagnosed when the body stops producing insulin, or when it has problems making enough insulin or using it properly.

### TYPE 1 DIABETES

(also known as Juvenile Diabetes)

Type 1 diabetes is an auto-immune disease in which the pancreas does not produce insulin. Glucose builds up in the blood instead of being used for energy because there is no insulin to aid in absorption. Type 1 diabetes is not preventable and is not related to other lifestyle factors (obesity, sugar intake, etc.); however the precise cause of type 1 diabetes remains unknown. The body's defense system may attack insulin-making cells by mistake, but the reason for this is unclear.

People are usually diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes before the age of 30, most often during childhood or their teens. Sometimes type 1 diabetes is also called Juvenile Diabetes.

The good news: People with diabetes can live long and healthy lives by keeping blood glucose levels (the amount of sugar in the blood) in the target range set by medical doctors.

Glucose levels are kept under control by:

- Taking insulin as required (and other medications, if prescribed by a doctor);
- Eating healthy meals and snacks; and,
- Enjoying regular physical activity.

## AM I AT RISK OF DEVELOPING TYPE 2 DIABETES?

EVERYONE aged 40 or over is at risk for type 2 diabetes and should be tested at least every three years. If any of the following risks factors apply, earlier and/or more frequent testing is recommended:

- You are a member of a high-risk group, which includes Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit peoples and people of Latino, Asian, South Asian or African descent
- You are overweight (this is especially important if you carry most of the weight around your abdomen)
- You have a parent, brother or sister who has diabetes
- You have health complications that are associated with diabetes
- You have given birth to a baby that weighed more than 4 kg (9 lb)
- You have had gestational diabetes (diabetes during pregnancy)
- You already have impaired glucose tolerance or impaired fasting glucose
- Your blood pressure is high
- Your levels of cholesterol or other fats in the blood are high
- You have a diagnosis of polycystic ovary syndrome, acanthosis nigricans (darkened patches of skin), or schizophrenia

## TYPE 2 DIABETES

Type 2 diabetes is a disease in which the pancreas does not produce enough insulin, or the body does not properly use the insulin it makes. With Type 2 diabetes glucose also builds up in the blood instead of being used for energy. Type 2 diabetes is a progressive, life-long condition; over time, it may be more difficult to keep blood glucose levels in the target range.

A healthcare team can help by working with people who have type 2 diabetes to adjust food plans, activity and medications.

The good news is that people with diabetes can live long and healthy lives by keeping blood glucose levels in the target range set by medical doctors.

Glucose levels are kept under control by:

- Eating healthy meals and snacks
- Enjoying regular physical activity
- Taking diabetes medications (including insulin), if prescribed by your doctor

**TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR HEALTH!** Start by visiting the websites of Diabetes Québec [www.diabete.qc.ca](http://www.diabete.qc.ca) and the Canadian Diabetes Association [www.diabetes.ca](http://www.diabetes.ca) to learn more about diabetes prevention, identification and management of diabetes.

# How can I tell if I have diabetes?

The following symptoms may indicate the presence of diabetes:

- **Unusual thirst**
- **Frequent urination**
- **Weight change (gain or loss)**
- **Extreme fatigue or lack of energy**
- **Blurred vision**
- **Frequent or recurring infections**
- **Cuts and bruises that are slow to heal**
- **Tingling or numbness in hands or feet**
- **Trouble getting and maintaining an erection**

It is a good idea to see a doctor if you have any of these signs, but it's especially important if you are experiencing more than one. There are three different medical tests available that are used to diagnose diabetes. **Many people who have type 2 diabetes may display no symptoms**, so routine medical appointments are a very important part of diabetes prevention and assessment.

## **These are some basic tips to follow if you have recently been diagnosed with diabetes:**

- Take all medications as directed by your doctor
- Check your blood glucose levels regularly and keep them in your target range
- Follow a balanced meal plan
- Be physically active
- Keep your cholesterol and other blood fats in your target range
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Keep your blood pressure at or close to target level
- Manage your stress effectively
- Take care of your feet
- Regularly visit your dentist, eye care specialist (every year) and doctor
- Don't smoke

## **Diabetes and the Emotional Roller-Coaster**

Diabetes is a chronic condition. It is perfectly normal to feel a range of different emotions when you learn your diagnosis including **denial, fear, anger, sadness, anxiety, grief, or depression.**



The best way to handle these emotions is to discuss them with someone you trust – a partner or spouse, a friend or family member, or your doctor or mental health professional. Remember that you are not alone and that help is available!

**MYTH:** Diabetes isn't a serious disease because people with diabetes do not have to limit their activities.

**FACT:** If left untreated or improperly managed, diabetes can result in a variety of complications, including:

- Heart disease
- Kidney disease
- Eye disease
- Problems with erection (impotence)
- Nerve damage

The first step in preventing or delaying the onset of these complications is recognizing the risk factors, as well as signs and symptoms of diabetes.

### How is diabetes treated?

People with diabetes can live active, independent and vibrant lives if they make a lifelong commitment to careful diabetes management, which includes the following:

- **Education:** Diabetes education is an important first step. All people with diabetes need to be informed about their condition.
- **Physical Activity:** Regular physical activity helps your body lower blood glucose levels, promotes weight loss, reduces stress and enhances overall fitness.
- **Nutrition:** What, when and how much you eat, all play an important role in regulating blood glucose levels.
- **Weight Management:** Maintaining a healthy weight is especially important in the management of type 2 diabetes.
- **Medication:** Type 1 diabetes is always treated with insulin. Type 2 diabetes is managed through physical activity and meal planning and may require medications and/or insulin to assist your body in making or using insulin more effectively.
- **Lifestyle Management:** Learning to reduce stress levels in day-to-day life can help people with diabetes better manage their disease.
- **Blood Pressure:** High blood pressure can lead to eye disease, heart disease, stroke and kidney disease, so people with diabetes should try to maintain a blood pressure level at or below 130/80. To do this, you may need to change your eating and physical activity habits and/or take medication.