

UNICITY

TYPE 2 DIABETES 101

What You Need to Know

I've Just Been Diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes

Being told that you have type 2 diabetes can be scary news, especially if you don't know what to expect. You may be feeling overwhelmed by all of the medical information your doctor gives you, or your symptoms might be making you feel very uncomfortable. There's a lot going on in your body right now, and probably a lot going on in your head.

If you have type 2 diabetes, you're not alone. In fact, 29.1 million Americans live with some type of diabetes according to the American Diabetes Association Data and Statistics, revised in 2015. Type 2 is the most common kind, accounting for nearly 90% of all the people with diabetes. That's almost one out of every ten Americans. You're also not out of options. This guide is designed to help cut through all the noise surrounding type 2 diabetes and its management, giving you the facts you need to manage your condition and stay healthy. By working with your doctor and your diabetes team and taking good care of yourself, you can live a long, healthy life.

What is Type 2 Diabetes?

If you've been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, your doctor has determined that the amount of glucose (a type of sugar) in your blood is above normal levels. The reason your glucose levels are high is because your body isn't using a hormone called *insulin* the right way. For some people, type 2 diabetes occurs because their body isn't making enough insulin. In other people, their body might not be using insulin very effectively.

Your body needs food in order to have enough energy to do just about anything. More specifically, it needs the glucose from your food. Whenever you eat something, the body breaks it down and releases the sugar it finds into the blood stream. Normally, your pancreas responds to this increase in sugar by creating more insulin. The insulin tells your cells to open and allow the glucose in. Your body may use the glucose right away, or it might store it for later use. The important thing is that it's out of your blood system.

If you have diabetes, though, this system doesn't work as smoothly. When you don't have enough insulin, or if your body doesn't respond to insulin, the glucose in your blood doesn't enter your cells. Instead, it just builds up in your blood stream. High glucose levels can cause many problems for your body, especially if it's not managed the right way.

Why Is My Body Having Trouble with Insulin?

We don't fully understand why some people have diabetes and some don't. However, there are some clear risk factors:

Being Overweight and Carrying Fat on Your Abdomen:

There is a clear connection between being overweight and having type 2 diabetes. In fact, half of men and 70% of women who have diabetes are also obese. The place where you carry weight is also significant. Fatty tissue around your waist and belly tends to make your cells more resistant to insulin, something that can cause your blood sugar levels to rise. Your risk of diabetes is higher if you're a woman with a waist that's more than 35 inches around, or a man with a waist that is bigger than 40 inches. Asian Americans may have an increased risk with a smaller waist circumference because they have a smaller body size in general.

Not Getting Enough Exercise:

Exercise helps your body use insulin the right way. If you don't exercise, you're missing out on a tool that can help your body manage blood sugar effectively. This leaves you with a higher risk of diabetes. Not getting enough exercise is also linked with being overweight or obese, which further increases your type 2 diabetes risk.

Having a Family History of Diabetes:

Researchers have found that there is a link between having a family history of diabetes and experiencing diabetes yourself. If your parents or grandparents had diabetes, it might have contributed to your diagnosis.

Your Genetics:

Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Island Americans, African Americans and Native Americans are at a higher risk.

Your Age:

Young people are developing type 2 diabetes at an alarming rate. This was nearly unheard of until the last two decades. In the American Diabetes Association Data and Statistics about Diabetes for 2015, this is reported as occurring at the rate of over 5,000 people under the age of 20 annually. Your risk of diabetes also increases as you age. When you turn 45, your risk starts to increase slowly. When you turn 65, your risk goes up much more quickly, often because of a decrease in physical activity and less healthy food choices. While there's nothing you can do to turn back time, you can start to keep a close eye on your blood sugar levels as you grow older, remain physically active and make healthy food choices. According to the American Diabetes Association 2015 Data and Statistics, 25.9% of people 65 or over have type 2 diabetes.

Having Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS):

This condition, in which includes cysts that grow on the ovaries, excessive facial hair, menstrual disorders, overweight and insulin resistance puts women at a higher risk of type 2 diabetes. Researchers believe that a resistance to insulin might be the cause of these cysts' growth, which creates a clear connection between PCOS and diabetes risk.

Being Diagnosed with Pre-Diabetes:

Your doctor may have diagnosed you with pre-diabetes a few years ago if your blood sugar was a little bit higher than normal. Pre-diabetes is a clear sign that your body is not processing or using insulin as it should, and is a notable risk factor for type 2 diabetes.

How Does My Doctor Know I Have Diabetes?

Your doctor has a variety of tests at his or her disposal to help determine if your blood sugar levels are out of the 'normal' range. The following four tests are the most commonly used to diagnose diabetes.

A1C Test:

Also known as the glycated hemoglobin test, this blood test determines how much sugar is attached to your red blood cells. The more sugar attached to the cells, the higher your blood sugar levels have been over the past 2-3 months. In order to diagnose someone with diabetes, this test must return a score of 6.5 percent or higher on two separate tests.

Fasting Blood Sugar Test:

For this test, you'll be asked to go without eating for 8-12 hours (usually overnight). Your blood will be drawn and tested to measure how much glucose is present. A normal result is less than 100 mg/dL. If your results are 126 mg/dL or greater on two separate tests, you have diabetes.

Random Blood Sugar Test:

This test involves taking a blood sample at a random time. If the results show that your blood level is 200 mg/dL or above and you have symptoms of high blood sugar, you likely have diabetes. Your doctor will likely order one of these others tests to confirm the diagnosis.

Oral Glucose Tolerance Test:

After fasting overnight, your blood sugar level is measured. You'll be given glucose, a sugary liquid to drink, and then your blood will be tested from time to time over the next two hours. If your blood sugar level is 200 mg/dL or higher after two hours, you have diabetes.

What's Symptoms Will I Have?

Diabetes causes many symptoms, some of which you might be experiencing already. Here are the most common issues people face when blood sugar is above normal. It is important to know that some people have no symptoms until a major complication occurs.

Increased Urination:

When your blood sugar levels rise, your kidneys start working harder to lower them. The number one way they do this is by producing more urine. The result? You'll find yourself running to the bathroom much more often than usual.

Increased Thirst:

If you've found yourself feeling much thirstier lately, it's likely because your body is producing more urine. In order to keep hydrated, you need to replace the liquids you've lost. As a result, your body tells you to drink more water.

Increased Hunger:

When you have diabetes, your body isn't able to convert food into energy very efficiently. Because it's not getting the energy it needs to function properly, it asks you for more food. As a result, you feel much hungrier than normal, even right after you've had something to eat.

Fatigue:

Diabetes can tire you out in a few different ways. Because you're producing so much urine, you're likely to be getting up several times during the night to empty your bladder. Without quality sleep, you'll start to feel run down during the day. A high level of sugar in the blood means your cells are being deprived from getting all of the nutrients they need to function, leaving you feeling even more tired.

Weight Loss:

When your body isn't converting sugar into energy, it has to look elsewhere to get what it needs. In many cases this means you'll start burning fat and muscle, leading to rapid weight loss. Having your weight fluctuate up and down a few pounds is normal but if you have any excessive, unexplained weight loss, get in contact with your doctor.

Skin Changes:

Type 2 diabetes can lead to acanthosis nigricans, a condition in which the skin becomes darker, thicker, and takes on a velvety appearance. These changes are most likely to happen in body folds and creases, such as in your neck, groin, and armpit. Acanthosis nigricans is most likely to impact people who are overweight or obese.

Danger Section: Type 2 Diabetes Complications

If your blood sugar is not well controlled, there is a chance that complications can occur. Some of these complications lead to problems that need immediate medical care, while others take a toll on your health more slowly. However, all complications of diabetes are issues that can have a serious impact on your health and lifestyle.

Complications that Need Immediate Care

High Blood Sugar:

High blood sugar (also called hyperglycemia) is a condition in which there is a high level of sugar in your blood. It can occur in response to poor diet, lack of exercise, non-diabetes medications or inadequate use of diabetes medicine. The early signs of hyperglycemia are increased thirst and urination, blurred vision, headache, and fatigue. If high blood sugar is not controlled, it can lead to a life-threatening coma. See HHNS below.

Low Blood Sugar:

Low blood sugar (also called hypoglycemia) happens when your blood sugar is too low. It's most likely to happen if you are undergoing insulin therapy or take other diabetes medication. Missing meals or snacks or drinking alcohol can sometimes cause your blood sugar levels to dip too low. Increased physical exertion can also lead to low blood sugar. Symptoms of low blood sugar come on very quickly and must be treated quickly. The early signs that this is happening include hunger, irritability, anxiety, dizziness, shakiness, sweating, and headache. Hypoglycemia can also occur at night, leaving you with sweaty sheets, nightmares, and confusion when you wake up. If you allow your low blood sugar to continue unchecked, it can lead to seizures, unconsciousness, and even death. The treatment of low blood sugar is to eat or drink carbohydrates such as glucose tablets, fruit juice, sugar, honey, or milk immediately.

HHNS:

HHNS is a much easier way to refer to hyperglycemic hyperosmolar nonketotic syndrome. HHNS is very rare but it can occur when you experience extremely high blood sugar levels, and is often triggered by an infection or illness. In response to

these dangerously high levels of blood glucose, the body starts creating very large amounts of urine, putting you at risk of dehydration if you don't receive treatment. A blood sugar level of 600 milligrams per deciliter or higher is the clearest sign of HHNS and it can allow harmful acids to build up in your blood. This buildup can lead to breath that smells fruity, shortness of breath, nausea, dry mouth, confusion, abdominal pain, weakness and hallucinations. If you don't receive care, you could go into a coma or even die.

Long Term Complications of Type 2 Diabetes



Heart Disease:

People with diabetes are twice as likely as people without diabetes to have heart disease and stroke. People with diabetes and pre diabetes are also likely to have issues with their heart at a younger age. Over time, high levels of glucose increases the build-up of fatty deposits and causes increased inflammation on the walls of your blood vessels. This build-up and inflammation increases your risk for stroke, heart attack, and other potentially deadly problems.



Kidney Damage:

Diabetes causes damage to small blood vessels all over your body, including ones found in your kidneys. The damage keeps your kidneys from working the way they should, which can cause many complications. You might gain weight, have swollen ankles, and suffer from a build-up of waste materials in your blood. Later stages of kidney damage might force you to go on dialysis or put you in need of a kidney transplant.



Nerve Damage:

Between 60 and 70 percent of people with diabetes have some level of damage to their nerves. If you are one of these people, you might end up feeling numbness, tingling, or pain in your arms, feet, legs, or hands. The nerves that allow normal digestion and control bladder and bowel function can also be affected.



Foot Damage:

Diabetes damages the nerves in the feet more than any other part of the body. As a result, you could end up not having any feeling in your feet at all. This makes it difficult to notice injuries, like cuts, scrapes, and blisters. You can't take care of an injury you don't know about, which means you're at a higher risk of infection. The skin of the feet can become very dry and cracked. In extreme cases, the combination of nerve damage and poor circulation in the feet makes amputation a necessity.



Vision Issues:

The blood vessels in your eyes can be impacted by high blood sugar. The changes in these vessels can cause eye and pressure, dark spots, sudden loss of vision and, potentially, blindness. If you have diabetes, you also have a higher risk of glaucoma (nerve damage in the eye due to excess pressure) and cataracts (a cloudy layer over your eye's lens).



Dementia from All Causes:

Research into the connection between diabetes and dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, has evidence that people with Type 2 diabetes have a higher chance of developing some type of dementia.



Hearing Loss:

The connection between type 2 diabetes and hearing loss is still unclear, but people with diabetes are twice as likely to experience trouble hearing as people who are not diabetic.



Erectile Dysfunction

This is a strong indicator of impending heart disease.



Bladder and Vaginal Infections

Type 2 diabetes that is uncontrolled and results in high blood glucose can negatively affect your body's ability to fight off infections of all kinds. As a result, women with uncontrolled blood sugar have a higher risk of bladder infections and vaginal yeast infections.

With complications like these, it's understandable why diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States. While knowing that you are at risk for all of these problems can be scary, there is good news: by managing your diabetes carefully, you can significantly lower your risk of all of these complications.

Managing Your Diabetes: What You Can Do

There's a lot you can do to keep your blood sugar levels normal. Making aggressive changes in your lifestyle and keeping a close eye on your blood sugar levels can make a big difference. Your doctor, diabetes educator and nutritionist will spend some time talking with you about the changes you should make. It's likely the following areas will come up:

DIET:

The foods you eat can have a noticeable impact on your blood sugar levels. Making healthy choices can help keep your glucose levels steady, as well as help you lose weight. Manage your diabetes by focusing your diet around these types of food:



Beans and Legumes:

Tasty and easy to prepare, beans and legumes are a great source of protein. They're also filled with soluble fiber (which helps slow down glucose absorption) and complex carbohydrates, perfect for keeping full when you're trying to lose weight.

Fruits:

If you have a sweet tooth, reach for fruits instead of soda, cookies, or candy. Fruits like peaches, pears, apples, and berries are filled with nutrients and antioxidants. They're a great way to enjoy something sweet without sacrificing your blood sugar levels.



Vegetables:

Non-starchy vegetables are a cornerstone of a diabetes-friendly diet. Enjoy broccoli, spinach, peppers, kale, and dozens of other veggies for plenty of nutrients, fiber, and carbohydrates. Steam, roast, or grill your favorites for an easy side dish.

Lean Protein:

Your body's cells need plenty of lean protein for growth and maintenance. Consuming protein can also help you keep your blood sugar levels steady. Good protein choices include chicken breasts, egg whites, tofu, and fish.





Whole Grains:

Whole grains are a filling way to include plenty of fiber in your diet. Read labels to find products that have high levels of whole grain, or make your own dishes out of steel cut oats, brown rice, millet, or quinoa.

Dairy:

These foods provide you with protein, carbohydrates, and other nutrients. Milk, cheese, plain Greek yogurt, and cottage cheese are all great choices, but be savvy when shopping. Read labels carefully and avoid products with added sugar.



Nuts and Seeds:

Your body needs fat to survive, and there are few better sources of healthy fats than nuts and seeds. Snack on almonds, cashews, pumpkin seeds, or chia seeds for a healthy treat, but be careful of serving sizes. These foods are high in calories, so don't over-indulge if you're trying to lose weight.



We encourage you to download our **Diabetic Meal Plan Guide**. It is the most comprehensive guide available. This guide includes a comprehensive list of hundreds of foods to eat and avoid.

[Download](#)

EXERCISE:

Being active makes your cells more sensitive to insulin. That alone is reason enough to include exercise into your diabetes management strategy. It's also a great way to lose weight, and it can even improve your A1C results. It might not always be easy to stick with an exercise plan, but finding something you enjoy doing can make it easier. Try out a dance or yoga class, or take music along with you for daily walks. The more you enjoy an activity, the more likely you are to stick with it.

WEIGHT MANAGEMENT:

Being overweight can increase your risk of diabetes complications and can make it more difficult to keep your symptoms under control. Even losing as little as five to seven percent of your body weight can make a huge difference in your health.

Eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly goes a long way when managing your weight. See a nutritionist that specializes in diabetes to build a plan that will both help you lose weight and give you better control over your blood sugar.

MONITOR YOUR BLOOD SUGAR:

If your doctor instructs you to monitor your blood sugar, follow his or her instructions closely. Keeping track of your glucose levels can help to make sure they stay within your target range. Talk to your doctor and diabetes team to learn more about what can influence your glucose levels and what to do if you observe levels that are abnormally low or high.

Managing Your Diabetes: How Your Doctor Can Help

If lifestyle changes aren't enough to keep your diabetes under control, your doctor may be able to provide some additional treatments. Talk the following options over with your doctor to see if they can provide any benefits.



Medication

There are a variety of medications available that will help your body better manage diabetes. Some medications make your body more sensitive to insulin. Some help your body produce more insulin. Your doctor will consider your glucose levels as well as any other medications you're taking to find the best solution for you.

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Insulin Therapy

You may be able to better control your blood sugar levels through insulin therapy. This type of treatment involves administering insulin with a syringe or an insulin pen device. Your doctor will work with you to determine the best type of insulin for your situation, as well as how often you need to administer it.

You're Not Alone

Type 2 diabetes is a serious problem, but you're not alone. Today there are many resources that can help you manage your symptoms and control your blood sugar. Take care of yourself and take advantage of the help your doctor and diabetes team can offer, and there's no reason why you won't live a long and healthy life.

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