

Diabetes: How to avoid or manage this high-risk condition

There are 18.2 million people in the United States who have diabetes, with an estimated 5.2 million (or nearly one-third) who are unaware that they have the disease. Diabetes is a serious condition that, if left untreated or improperly managed, can lead to nerve and blood vessel damage, heart disease, stroke, blindness, kidney disease and more.

The most common form of diabetes can be linked to lifestyle behaviors. If you pay attention to your lifestyle habits and change those that put you at high risk for diabetes, you can help avoid the disease. And, if you or a family member has diabetes, a change in lifestyle habits, combined with regular testing, can help reduce risks for more serious complications later.

How do you know if you have diabetes?

If you haven't already learned that you have diabetes, here are signs and symptoms to look for:

- Increased thirst;
- Increased hunger;
- Fatigue;
- Increased urination, especially at night;
- Weight loss;
- Blurred vision; and
- Sores that do not heal.

The symptoms can be so mild that you might not even notice them. In fact, many people are unaware they have the disease until they have complications, such as blurred vision or heart trouble. Because treatment can prevent damage to the body, it's important to find out early if you have diabetes.

Should I be tested for diabetes?

If you have the symptoms described above, you should talk to a health coach or your doctor about getting tested for diabetes. Tests can include a fasting blood glucose test or an oral glucose tolerance test. In addition, anyone age 45 or older should consider getting tested. If you are 45 or older and overweight, it is strongly recommended that you get tested. If you are younger than 45, overweight and have one or more of the risk factors described on the next page, you also should consider getting tested.

What is diabetes?

For most people, after a meal, food is broken down into sugar, which is then converted into energy.

Diabetes is a disease in which blood sugar levels in the body are above normal and not enough energy is produced, leading to various health problems and complications over time. There are three kinds of diabetes:

- **Type 1 diabetes**, formerly called juvenile or insulin-dependent diabetes, is usually first diagnosed in children, teenagers or young adults.
- **Type 2 diabetes**, formerly called adult-onset or non-insulin-dependent diabetes, is the most common form of diabetes. People can develop type 2 diabetes at any age, even during childhood. Being overweight and inactive increases the chances of developing type 2 diabetes.
- **Gestational diabetes** may develop in some women during the late stages of pregnancy. Although this form of the disease usually goes away after the baby is born, a woman who has had it is more likely to develop type 2 diabetes later in life. Gestational diabetes is caused by the change in hormones during pregnancy or a shortage of insulin.

For more information about diabetes, visit the Healthwise Knowledgebase section of the Dialog CenterSM, available through LifeSteps Online, and enter the keyword: diabetes.

Besides age and weight, what other factors increase my risk for type 2 diabetes?

To find out your risk for type 2 diabetes or its complications, think about each of the following risk factors that applies to you:

- I have a parent, brother or sister with diabetes.
- My family background is African American, American Indian, Asian American, Pacific Islander or Hispanic American/Latino.
- I have had gestational diabetes, or I gave birth to at least one baby weighing more than 9 pounds.
- My blood pressure is 140/90 or higher, or I have been told that I have high blood pressure.
- My cholesterol levels are not normal. My HDL (“good”) cholesterol is 35 or lower, or my triglyceride level is 250 or higher.
- I am fairly inactive. I exercise less than three times a week.

A more comprehensive test to identify your risk for developing diabetes can be found online at www.diabetes.org/risk-test.jsp.

What can I do about my risk factors?

You can do a lot to lower your chances of developing type 2 diabetes and its complications through regular exercise, reduced fat and calories in your diet and overall weight management. You should also monitor your blood pressure and cholesterol levels and take steps to reduce your blood pressure and cholesterol if necessary. For example:

If your blood pressure is 140/90 or higher, take these steps:

- Maintain a reasonable body weight;
- Make wise food choices as much as possible;
- Be physically active every day;
- Reduce your intake of salt and alcohol; and
- Talk to your doctor about whether you need medicine to control your blood pressure.

If your cholesterol levels are not normal, take these steps:

- Make wise food choices as much as possible; and
- Be physically active every day.

For more information, visit the American Diabetes Association Web site at www.diabetes.org.

Treating diabetes

Treatment for type 1 and 2 diabetes includes making wise food choices, exercising regularly and controlling blood sugar levels, blood pressure and cholesterol. For more information about how to avoid or manage diabetes – including an assessment of your risk for diabetes and tests you should consider – contact a health coach. A health coach can also help you talk with your doctor about diabetes.

Call a LifeSteps health coach today!

1-877-LIFE-123 toll-free

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