

## Health Tip

# Understanding Diabetes

## What is diabetes?

A condition in which the pancreas is unable to process sugar effectively, leading to increased levels of glucose in the blood stream. Diabetes is a chronic condition that can be managed by everyday choices.

**Type 1 diabetes** is due to an autoimmune process that destroys the cells in the pancreas that make insulin. It is always treated with daily administration of insulin. Type 1 diabetes affects about 5% of the people with diabetes.

With type **2 diabetes**, your body cannot properly use insulin (a hormone that helps glucose get into the cells of the body). This results in blood glucose levels being higher than normal. Glucose, commonly known as sugar, is a source of energy. Foods that contain carbohydrates, such as fruit, bread, pasta and rice are common sources of glucose. When we eat these foods, they are broken down into simple sugar and then absorbed in our bloodstream. If your body is unable to process excess sugars effectively, your blood glucose levels rise to unhealthy levels. Type 2 diabetes is the most common type of diabetes and can be treated with healthier lifestyle choices, oral medications, non-insulin injections and/or insulin.

Having **pre-diabetes** means your blood glucose (sugar) levels are higher than normal, but not high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. Pre-diabetes may lead to heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes. Pre-diabetes may often be reversed by making healthier lifestyle choices.

## Why is it important to understand diabetes<sup>1</sup>?



Diabetes is the  
**7<sup>th</sup>** leading  
cause  
of death  
in the United States.

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## Diabetes signs and symptoms

- Fatigue
- Frequent urination
- Increased thirst and hunger
- Weight loss
- Blurred vision
- Slow healing of wounds or sores

If you have any of these signs and/or symptoms you should speak to your healthcare provider

## Diabetes risk factors

### Factors you cannot change:

- Age
- Gender
- Race

### Factors you can impact:

- Weight
- Inactivity
- Blood Pressure
- Cholesterol



## Managing diabetes/reducing your risk<sup>2</sup>

- Eat healthier by including a diet with lots of non-starchy vegetables; whole grain foods, lean cuts of meat, poultry, and non-fat dairy products. Include fatty fish (salmon, trout, sardines) 2-3 times per week.
- Get daily exercise by aiming for 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week.
- Maintain or obtain a healthy weight defined as a body mass index (BMI) measurement between 18.5 - 24.9.
- Monitor blood glucose regularly. Most people with diabetes should aim for an A1C of 7 or less.
- Take medications as prescribed.
- Don't smoke.
- Learn ways to lower your stress.
- Obtain routine care with your healthcare provider.

Based on a study by the Diabetes Prevention Program, a moderate weight reduction of 5 percent can help reduce the development of type 2 diabetes by 58 percent.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/library/socialmedia/infographics.html>

<sup>2</sup>American Diabetes Association, <http://www.diabetes.org/living-with-diabetes/treatment-and-care/blood-glucose-control/a1c/>

<sup>3</sup>Diabetes Prevention Program Outcome Study, <https://dppos.bsc.gwu.edu/web/dppos/dpp>