

November 2015 • Members

Diabetes Mellitus

Diabetes has been on the increase in the last 30 years. The number of adults with diabetes has grown by nearly 400%.¹ At the same time, the number of obese adults has also increased. Scientists believe these two trends are related. And they say that one-third of adults could have diabetes by the year 2050.¹ But this story has a silver lining. Early diagnosis and action can help reduce the number of cases. So they could help stem the tide of this epidemic.

What Is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a common condition that:

- Is marked by high levels of sugar (glucose) in the blood
- Affects many parts of the body
- Can cause serious health problems if left untreated

What Are the 2 Main Types of Diabetes?

Type 1 Diabetes

This type used to be called insulin-dependent diabetes or juvenile-onset diabetes. Type 1 is most often diagnosed in people in their mid-teens. It occurs when the body doesn't produce enough insulin. Insulin is a hormone that controls the blood sugar level. It's made in the pancreas. People with this type of diabetes must get insulin to survive. They can get it from an injection or a pump. There's no way to prevent type 1 diabetes at this time.

Type 2 Diabetes

Type 2 used to be called adult-onset diabetes. It's most often diagnosed in adults, but some children have it too. It's the most common type of diabetes. About 90% to 95% of all people with diabetes have this type.² It occurs when the body's cells can't use insulin as they should. The cells are "resistant" to the effects of insulin. The cells begin to need more of it, so the pancreas starts making more. But eventually it can't make enough. When cells no longer have enough insulin, a person has diabetes.



Diabetes Complications

Diabetes can cause serious complications if it's not treated. These include:

- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Kidney disease
- Eye and vision problems, including blindness
- Blood circulation problems that can lead to amputation of a foot or leg

Diabetes and Race/Ethnicity

Your risk of getting diabetes depends in part on your race and ethnicity.

| Race/Ethnicity | % of Adults with Diabetes ¹ |
|--------------------|--|
| Native American | 15.9 |
| African American | 13.2 |
| Hispanic | 12.8 |
| Asian American | 9.0 |
| Non-Hispanic White | 7.6 |

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What Are the Symptoms?

These symptoms can occur in both types of diabetes:

- Needing to urinate often
- Feeling very thirsty
- Feeling very hungry even if you are eating
- Being very tired
- Having blurry vision
- Having cuts and bruises that are slow to heal

In addition, people with type 1 might lose weight, even if they are eating more. And people with type 2 might have tingling and numbness in their hands or feet.

Sometimes people don't have symptoms. Or they might have very mild symptoms. This is especially true in type 2 diabetes.

What is Prediabetes?

People almost always have prediabetes before they get type 2 diabetes. In this stage, blood sugar levels are above normal. But they're not high enough to be considered diabetes. Prediabetes has no clear symptoms, so you can have it and not know it. But it's important to know if you have prediabetes. Because if you do, damage to your organs may already be starting.

What Is My Risk for Getting Prediabetes or Diabetes?

The risk factors for prediabetes and diabetes are very similar. They include:

- Being 45 years of age or older
- Having a family history of type 2 diabetes
- Being overweight or obese
- Having high blood pressure
- Having abnormal blood lipids
- Being inactive
- Being a member of certain racial/ethnic backgrounds (see Sidebar)
- Having polycystic ovary syndrome
- Having gestational diabetes during a pregnancy
- Giving birth to a baby weighing more than 9 pounds
- Some sleep problems

What Can I Do?

Make some changes in your lifestyle. These can greatly lower your risk for type 2 diabetes.

- Control your weight. Being overweight or obese is the single most important risk factor. It increases your risk significantly.^{3,4}
- Get moving. Using your muscles helps them use insulin better and puts less stress on your pancreas. Physical activity reduces your risk by 30% to 50%.⁵ As little as 30 minutes per day of moderate-intensity exercise helps.⁵
- Eat well. Choose more whole grains and fewer highly processed carbohydrates. Choose water, coffee, or tea over sugary drinks. Choose less red meat and more poultry and fish.
- If you smoke, try to quit. People who smoke have about a 50% higher risk than people who don't.⁶

How Can the Laboratory Help?

If you think you might be at risk for prediabetes or diabetes, talk to your doctor. Quest Diagnostics offers tests that can help your doctor find out whether you have either condition. If you are between the ages of 30 and 79, Quest can also provide you and your doctor with a risk score. It will tell you your risk of developing diabetes in the next 8 years. The score is based on:

- A physical exam
- Your family's health history
- Your laboratory test results

References

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