

# What Is Diabetes and How Can I Manage It?

Most of the food you eat is turned into glucose, or sugar, for your body to use for energy. Insulin is a hormone needed to convert sugar and other food into energy and to help glucose get into your body's cells.

When you have diabetes, your body either doesn't make enough insulin or can't use its own insulin as well as it should, or both. This causes sugars to build up too high in your blood.



Between doctor visits, you can monitor your blood sugar with a home glucose monitor. They are available at large discount retailers and pharmacies.

## What types of diabetes are there?

There are two main forms of diabetes: **type 1 diabetes** and **type 2 diabetes**.

Type 2 is the most common. About 90 percent to 95 percent of Americans diagnosed with diabetes have type 2 diabetes. It most often develops in middle-aged and older adults. It's often linked with being overweight, obese and physically inactive.

Type 2 diabetes develops when the body doesn't make enough insulin and doesn't efficiently use the insulin it makes (insulin resistance).

Type 1 diabetes usually starts early in life. It results from the body's failure to produce insulin. People with it must take insulin each day to control their levels of blood glucose (sugar).

## Am I at risk?

The number of people with diabetes is increasing. This is because more people are overweight or obese, don't get enough physical activity and are getting older.

However, many younger people are developing diabetes at an alarming rate. This is probably because being overweight; obese and not getting enough physical activity are increasing problems for this group too.

People in several ethnic groups seem to be more likely to develop type 2 diabetes. These include:

- Hispanics
- African Americans
- Native Americans
- Asians (especially South Asians)

## How can I control my risk for heart disease and stroke?

Diabetes is a major risk factor for stroke and heart disease. That means it can be as serious as smoking, high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, physical inactivity or obesity.

If you have diabetes, it's very important to have regular check-ups. Work closely with your healthcare

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provider to manage your diabetes and reduce any other risk factors:

- Manage your weight, blood pressure and blood cholesterol with a heart healthy eating plan that is low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, salt (sodium) and added sugars.
- Be physically active. Aim for at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) of moderate-intensity physical activity such as brisk walking, or 75 minutes (1 hour and 15 minutes) of vigorous-intensity, aerobic exercise each week.
- If you drink alcohol, don't have more than one drink per day for women or two per day for men.
- Lower your blood pressure, if it's too high. People with diabetes should keep blood pressure under 130/80 mm Hg.
- Don't smoke, and avoid second-hand smoke.
- If you take medications to help control your blood pressure, cholesterol or blood glucose, take them exactly as directed. If you have questions about the dosage or side effects, ask your doctor or pharmacist.



Following a heart-healthy eating plan is a great way to manage your diabetes and reduce other risk factors.

## HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 **Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professionals.** If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
- 2 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease.
- 3 For information on stroke, call **1-888-4-STROKE** (1-888-478-7653) or visit us at **StrokeAssociation.org**.

## Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**Can diabetes be cured?**

**What type of diet would be most helpful?**

## My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.

**Knowledge is power, so Learn and Live!**



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