

THE BASICS OF DIABETES

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a lifelong disease that affects the way the body uses food. When you have diabetes, your body cannot properly use the energy from the food you eat. Using food for energy is as important to your health as having air to breathe.

Diabetes causes sugar levels in the blood to be higher than they should be. When food breaks down it changes to sugar. Insulin, a hormone made in the pancreas, helps bring this sugar into the cells of your body so your body can use it for energy. People with diabetes cannot use the insulin they make very well, make too little insulin, or make no insulin at all. Therefore, the sugar stays in the blood instead of going to the cells of the body, making your blood sugar too high.

What Causes Diabetes?

No one really knows what causes diabetes. Most people with diabetes have type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes is more likely to occur in people who:

- ♥ are over 40 years old.
- ♥ are overweight.
- ♥ have a family history of diabetes.
- ♥ had diabetes during a pregnancy.
- ♥ have given birth to a baby weighing over 9 pounds.
- ♥ have high blood pressure.
- ♥ are African American.
- ♥ are Hispanic.
- ♥ are Native American.

What Are the Symptoms?

- σ Feeling tired
- σ Increased urination
- σ Increased thirst
- σ Dry, itchy skin
- σ Blurred eyesight
- σ Increased hunger
- σ Weight loss
- σ Slow-healing cuts or sores
- σ Problems with sexual function

Are There More Than One Type of Diabetes?

Yes, there are three types that we know of and see most often:

1. **Type 1 Diabetes** --- This is also known as insulin dependent diabetes and is usually seen in children, or people under 20 years old. The body makes little or no insulin with this type of diabetes.
2. **Type 2 Diabetes** --- This is also known as non-insulin dependent diabetes and is most often seen in adults. The body makes insulin, but cannot use it well, or the body may make very little insulin.
3. **Gestational diabetes** --- This is seen in some pregnant women.

What Do I Do To Control and Live With My Diabetes?

1. Plan what you eat. Follow a well-balanced plan. Your doctor or a nutritionist can help you with this.
2. Stay physically active --- EXERCISE!!
3. Take medicines as directed by your doctor.
4. Check your blood sugar as often as directed by your doctor.
5. Visit your doctor, nurse and dietitian regularly.
6. Lose weight if you are overweight (5 – 10 pounds can make a big difference in your blood sugars).
7. Know the symptoms and management of hypoglycemia (low sugar) and hyperglycemia (high sugar).
8. Wear identification at all times stating you have diabetes.

Are There Special Problems I May Have Because of My Diabetes?

Yes, there are several problems you need to be aware of and take precautions against. A person with diabetes is more likely than other people to have:

- ♥ a heart attack
- ♥ a stroke
- ♥ eye problems that can lead to blindness
- ♥ kidney disease
- ♥ a foot or leg amputated (removed by surgery)
- ♥ frequent infections
- ♥ sexual problems

These are all serious problems, but you can protect yourself against much of this damage if you keep your blood sugars under good control.

What Should My Blood Sugar Be?

In people who do not have diabetes, a normal blood sugar is 70 to 110. We know that people who have diabetes can greatly decrease their risk of complications if they keep their blood sugars between 80 and 150. Your doctor or nurse will help you determine a “good” blood sugar for you.