

What Is Diabetes and Am I at Risk?

Diabetes is a condition that results in blood sugar rising to dangerous levels. Blood glucose, also called blood sugar, is your main source of energy and comes mostly from the food you eat. Insulin is a hormone that helps your body's cells absorb the glucose from your blood and use it as fuel for energy or store it for later use.

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



Between doctor visits, you can monitor your blood glucose with a home glucose monitor. You can purchase one at retail stores, pharmacies and online.

What types of diabetes are there?

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

Type 2 diabetes is the most common. About 90 to 95 percent of American adults diagnosed with diabetes have type 2. It is most common in middle-aged and older adults but can appear in young adults.

Insulin resistance is associated with type 2 diabetes and occurs when your body produces insulin but does not use it well. This causes blood glucose to go up.

Type 1 diabetes usually occurs in children and young adults but can appear in adults. In type 1 diabetes, your body isn't able to produce insulin. People with it must take insulin to control their blood glucose.

Am I at risk for type 2 diabetes?

Over **30 million Americans** have type 2 diabetes. You're more likely to develop type 2 diabetes if you are:

- **45 or older.**
- **overweight or obese.**
- **don't get enough physical activity.**
- **have a family history of diabetes.**
- **have had gestational diabetes.**
- **have prediabetes.**

These and other factors can increase your risk. While type 2 diabetes is more common in adults, younger people are developing it at increasing rates.

People from the following ethnic groups are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes:

- **Hispanic or Latino**
- **Black or African American**
- **American Indian**
- **Asian (especially South Asian)**
- **Pacific Islander**

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How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will do one of four blood tests to measure your blood glucose level. Each test usually needs to be repeated on a second day to confirm results. Testing should be carried out in a health care setting (such as your doctor's office or a lab). The two most common are the **fasting plasma glucose test (FPG)** and **A1C test**. For the FPG test, you must fast (nothing to eat or drink except water) for eight hours prior to the test. It is measured in milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL).

Normal glucose is less than 100 mg/dL. **Diabetes is diagnosed at a level of 126 mg/dL or higher on at least two occasions.** A condition called prediabetes is when your results are between 100 mg/dL and 126 mg/dL.

Your healthcare provider may use an **A1C test** to determine whether you may have diabetes, prediabetes or to monitor your diabetes. An A1C test measures your average blood glucose for the past two to three months and the results are a percentage. **Diabetes is diagnosed if your A1C is above 6.5 percent.**

How can I manage diabetes and reduce my risk for heart disease and stroke?

If you have diabetes, it's important to have regular check-ups. You may need to check your blood glucose level one or more times daily and monitor your carbohydrate intake. You may also need medication to help manage your blood glucose levels.

Diabetes is a major risk factor for stroke and heart disease. Managing your diabetes is key in helping to prevent heart disease and stroke. **You can reduce your risk by taking these actions:**

- Talk to your doctor at your next appointment.
- Implement lifestyle changes – including healthy eating habits, weight loss and increased physical activity.
- Quit smoking.
- Properly manage stress.
- Monitor and keep track of your blood glucose, blood pressure, cholesterol and body weight as directed by your doctor.
- Take medication(s) as prescribed by your doctor.
- Visit **KnowDiabetesbyHeart.org** for more resources.

If you take medications, take them exactly as directed. If you have questions about the dosage or side effects, ask your health care provider or pharmacist.

Do you have questions or comments for your doctor or nurse?

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

Can diabetes be cured? What types of changes to my diet can I make?



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

Visit **KnowDiabetesbyHeart.org** for resources to help continue the conversation with loved ones and doctors:

1. Take a quiz to understand how well you know about diabetes and your risk for cardiovascular disease, heart attacks and strokes.
2. Download a discussion guide with the top three questions and conversation-starters for your next appointment with your doctor.
3. Sign up for the **American Diabetes Association's Living with Type 2 Diabetes Program**, a free, year-long program, to reduce your risks and receive ongoing support for your personal health journey.
4. Participate in our **Ask the Experts Q&A Series** where you can learn more about the link between diabetes and cardiovascular disease and ask a question of our experts.