

Diabetes Myth Busters

On behalf of the millions of Americans who live with or are at risk for diabetes, we are committed to helping you understand this chronic disease. Help us set the record straight and educate the world about diabetes and its risk factors by sharing the common questions and answers below.

If you're overweight, will you always develop type 2 diabetes?

Being overweight is a risk factor for developing diabetes, but other risk factors such as how much physical activity you get, family history, ethnicity, and age also play a role. Unfortunately, many people think that weight is the only risk factor for type 2 diabetes, but many people with type 2 diabetes are at a normal weight or only moderately overweight.

Is diabetes caused by eating sugar?

A diet high in calories from any source (including sugar) contributes to weight gain and weight gain increases your risk for type 2 diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is caused by genetics and unknown factors that trigger the onset of the disease. Type 2 diabetes is not caused by sugar, but by genetics and lifestyle factors.

Do sugary drinks cause diabetes?

Research has also shown that drinking sugary drinks is linked to type 2 diabetes. The American Diabetes Association recommends that people avoid drinking sugar-sweetened beverages to help prevent type 2 diabetes.

Sugary drinks also raise blood glucose (also called blood sugar) and can provide several hundred calories in just one serving. Just one 12-ounce can of regular soda has about 150 calories and 40 grams of carbohydrate. This is the same amount of carbohydrate in 10 teaspoons of sugar.

Sugar-sweetened beverages include beverages like:

- Regular soda
- Fruit punch
- Fruit drinks
- Energy drinks
- Sports drinks
- Sweet tea
- Other sugary drinks

Is diabetes a serious disease?

Yes. Diabetes causes more deaths per year than breast cancer and AIDS combined, and having diabetes nearly doubles your chance of having a heart attack. The good news is that managing your diabetes can reduce your risk for diabetes complications.

Diabetes Myth Busters

Do people with diabetes need to eat special foods?

A healthy meal plan for people with diabetes is generally the same as healthy eating for anyone – low in saturated fat, moderate in salt and sugar, with meals based on lean protein, non-starchy vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats, and fruit. Foods that say they are healthier for people with diabetes generally offer no special benefit. Most of them still raise blood glucose levels, are more expensive, and can also have a laxative effect if they contain sugar alcohols.

If you have diabetes, do you have to only eat small amounts of starchy foods, such as bread, potatoes, and pasta?

Starchy foods can be part of a healthy meal plan, but portion size is key. Breads, cereals, pasta, rice (whole grain options are better), and starchy vegetables like potatoes, yams, peas, and corn can be included in your meals and snacks.

Can people with diabetes eat sweets or chocolate?

If eaten as part of a healthy meal plan, or combined with exercise, sweets and desserts can be eaten by people with diabetes. They are no more "off limits" to people with diabetes than they are to people without diabetes. The key to sweets is to have a very small portion and save them for special occasions so you focus your meal on more healthful foods.

Can you catch diabetes from someone else?

No. Although we don't know exactly why some people develop diabetes and others don't, we know diabetes is not contagious. It can't be caught like a cold or flu.

Are people with diabetes more likely to get colds and other illnesses?

You are no more likely to get a cold or another illness if you have diabetes. People with diabetes are advised to get flu shots. This is because any illness can make diabetes more difficult to control, and people with diabetes who get the flu are more likely than others to go on to develop serious complications.

If you have type 2 diabetes and your doctor says you need to start using insulin, does it mean you're failing to take care of your diabetes properly?

Using insulin to get blood glucose levels to a healthy level is a good thing, not a bad one. For most people, type 2 diabetes is a progressive disease. When first diagnosed, many people with type 2 diabetes can keep their blood glucose at a healthy level with a combination of meal planning, physical activity, and taking oral medications. But over time, the body gradually produces less and less of its own insulin, and eventually oral medications may not be enough to keep blood glucose levels in a healthy range.