



What Is Diabetes and How Can I Manage It?

Your digestive track breaks down the carbohydrates that you eat into glucose — a type of sugar — which gets absorbed into the blood. Insulin is a hormone that helps your body's cells absorb the glucose from the blood and use it or store it for energy.

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 many large 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 American adults 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.

Insulin resistance is a condition where the body produces insulin but does not use it efficiently and blood glucose goes up. If uncontrolled, insulin resistance can lead to pre-diabetes or type 2 diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes usually starts early in life, but it can also develop in adults. 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.

Am I at risk?

The number of people with diabetes is increasing. More people are overweight or obese, don't get enough

physical activity and don't eat a healthy diet. These factors can increase risk of type 2 diabetes. While type 2 diabetes has historically been more common in adults, many younger people are developing diabetes at an alarming rate.

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

- Hispanics/Latinos
- 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. Other major risk factors are smoking, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, physical inactivity or obesity.

If you have diabetes, it's very important to have

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regular check-ups. Work closely with your healthcare provider to manage your diabetes and reduce any other risk factors:

- Manage your weight, blood pressure and cholesterol with a heart-healthy eating plan that is low in saturated fat, *trans* fat, salt (sodium) and added sugars.
- Be physically active. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity 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. Aim for a normal blood pressure which is less than 120 mm Hg for the systolic (upper) number and less than 80 mm Hg for the diastolic (lower) number.
- Don't smoke, and avoid second-hand smoke.
- If you take medications, take them exactly as directed. If you have questions about the dosage or side effects, ask your healthcare provider 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 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

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.



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