



# WHAT CAUSES DIABETES?



## Know your risks.

Although often referred to as one disease, diabetes is actually a group of diseases. While all types of diabetes mean that you have a higher than normal level of glucose in the blood, the causes and risk factors for each type are different.

### Type 1 diabetes

Causes may include:<sup>1</sup>

- Genetics – heredity plays an important part in determining who develops type 1 diabetes. Genes are passed down from a biological parent to their child.
- Certain environmental factors, such as viruses

### Type 2 diabetes

Causes may include:<sup>1</sup>

- Genes and family history – certain genes may make you more likely to develop type 2 diabetes. Genes can also increase the risk of type 2 diabetes by increasing a person's tendency to become overweight or obese.
- Overweight, obesity and physical inactivity are associated with the development of type 2 diabetes. Extra weight sometimes causes insulin resistance and is common in people with type 2 diabetes. The location of body fat also makes a difference. Extra belly fat is linked to insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes, and heart and blood vessel disease.
- Insulin resistance – type 2 diabetes usually begins with insulin resistance, a condition in which muscle, liver, and fat cells do not use insulin well.

Risk factors for type 2 diabetes may include:

- Being age 45 or older
- Family history of diabetes
- Overweight or obese
- Physical inactivity
- High blood pressure
- Family background that is African American, Alaska Native, American Indian, Asian American, Hispanic/ Latino, Native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders
- History of giving birth to a baby weighing more than nine pounds
- History of gestational diabetes
- Polycystic ovary syndrome, also called PCOS
- Low level of HDL (good) cholesterol or a high level of triglycerides
- Acanthosis nigricans, a skin condition associated with insulin resistance, characterized by a dark, velvety rash around the neck or armpits
- History of heart disease or stroke

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## Gestational diabetes

You are at greater risk for gestational diabetes if you:<sup>2</sup>

- Are older than 25 when you are pregnant
- Come from a higher-risk ethnic group, such as Hispanic American, African American, Native American, Southeast Asian or Pacific Islander
- Have a family history of diabetes
- Gave birth to a baby that weighed more than nine pounds (4 kg) or had a birth defect
- Have high blood pressure
- Have too much amniotic fluid
- Have had an unexplained miscarriage or stillbirth
- Were overweight before your pregnancy
- Gain too much weight during your pregnancy
- Have polycystic ovarian syndrome



### Have questions or concerns about your risk for prediabetes and diabetes?

Talk with your doctor, who can make the appropriate recommendations based on your health history.



Sources:

1. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. "Causes of Diabetes." <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diabetes/causes> (November 2016)

2. Medline Plus Medical Encyclopedia. "Gestational Diabetes." <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000896.htm> (reviewed May 16, 2016)

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