

# Diabetes

facts

## More than **three million** Canadians have diabetes

There are three main types of diabetes. **Type 1 diabetes**, usually diagnosed in children and adolescents, occurs when the pancreas is unable to produce insulin. Insulin is a hormone that controls the amount of glucose in the blood. Approximately 10 per cent of people with diabetes have type 1 diabetes.

The remaining 90 per cent have **type 2 diabetes**, which occurs when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin or when the body does not effectively use the insulin that is produced. Type 2 diabetes usually develops in adulthood, although increasing numbers of children in high-risk populations are being diagnosed.

A third type of diabetes, **gestational diabetes**, is a temporary condition that occurs during pregnancy. It affects approximately 2 to 4 per cent of all pregnancies (in the non-Aboriginal population) and involves an increased risk of developing diabetes for both mother and child.

## Is diabetes serious?

If left untreated or improperly managed, diabetes can result in a variety of complications, including:

- ◆ Heart disease
- ◆ Kidney disease
- ◆ Eye disease
- ◆ Problems with erection (impotence)
- ◆ Nerve damage

The first step in preventing or delaying the onset of these complications is recognizing the risk factors, as well as signs and symptoms of diabetes.

## What are the risk factors for diabetes?

If you are aged 40 or older, you are at risk for type 2 diabetes and should be tested at least every three years. If any of the following risk factors apply, you should be tested earlier and/or more often.

- Being:*
- ◆ a member of a high-risk group (Aboriginal, Hispanic, Asian, South Asian or African descent)
  - ◆ overweight (especially if you carry most of your weight around your middle)
- Having:*
- ◆ a parent, brother or sister with diabetes
  - ◆ health complications that are associated with diabetes
  - ◆ given birth to a baby that weighed more than 4 kg (9 lb)
  - ◆ had gestational diabetes (diabetes during pregnancy)
  - ◆ impaired glucose tolerance or impaired fasting glucose
  - ◆ high blood pressure
  - ◆ high cholesterol or other fats in the blood
  - ◆ been diagnosed with any of the following conditions:
    - polycystic ovary syndrome
    - acanthosis nigricans (darkened patches of skin)
    - schizophrenia

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## What are the symptoms?

Signs and symptoms of diabetes include the following:

- ◆ Unusual thirst
- ◆ Frequent urination
- ◆ Weight change (gain or loss)
- ◆ Extreme fatigue or lack of energy
- ◆ Blurred vision
- ◆ Frequent or recurring infections
- ◆ Cuts and bruises that are slow to heal
- ◆ Tingling or numbness in the hands or feet
- ◆ Trouble getting or maintaining an erection

It is important to recognize, however, that many people who have type 2 diabetes may display no symptoms.

## Can you prevent diabetes?

Research shows that lifestyle changes can help prevent or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes. A healthy meal plan, weight control and physical activity are important prevention steps.

## How is diabetes treated?

People with diabetes can expect to live active, independent and vital lives if they make a lifelong commitment to careful diabetes management, which includes the following:

**Education:** Diabetes education is an important first step. All people with diabetes need to be informed about their condition.

**Physical Activity:** Regular physical activity helps your body lower blood glucose levels, promotes weight loss, reduces stress and enhances overall fitness.

**Nutrition:** What, when and how much you eat all play an important role in regulating blood glucose levels.

**Weight Management:** Maintaining a healthy weight is especially important in the management of type 2 diabetes.

**Medication:** Type 1 diabetes is always treated with insulin. Type 2 diabetes is managed through physical activity and meal planning and may require medications and/or insulin to assist your body in controlling blood glucose more effectively.

**Lifestyle Management:** Learning to reduce stress levels in day-to-day life can help people with diabetes better manage their disease.

**Blood Pressure:** High blood pressure can lead to eye disease, heart disease, stroke and kidney disease, so people with diabetes should try to maintain a blood pressure level below 130/80. To do this, you may need to change your eating and physical activity habits and/or take medication.

*Across the country, the Canadian Diabetes Association is leading the fight against diabetes by helping people with diabetes live healthy lives while we work to find a cure. We are supported in our efforts by a community-based network of volunteers, employees, healthcare professionals, researchers and partners. By providing education and services, advocating on behalf of people with diabetes, supporting research and translating research into practical applications – we are delivering on our mission.*

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