

# What Is Diabetes? And How Can I Control It?

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**M**ost of the food we eat is turned into glucose, or sugar, for our bodies to use for energy. The pancreas, an organ near the stomach, makes a hormone called insulin to help glucose get into our bodies' cells. 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.

This disease has two main forms: type 1 and type 2. Type 2 is the most common. It's often linked with obesity and physical inactivity. It most often develops in middle-aged and older adults. Type 1, or juvenile diabetes, usually starts early in life. People with it must take insulin each day to regulate levels of blood glucose (sugar).



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## Am I at risk?

Diabetes is increasing. This is because more people are obese, don't get enough physical activity and are getting older. However, many younger people are developing diabetes. This is probably because obesity and lack of physical activity are increasing problems for this group, too.

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

- Hispanics
- African Americans
- Native Americans
- Asians (especially South Asians)

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## How can I control my risk?

Diabetes is a major risk factor for stroke and heart disease. That means it can be as serious as smoking, high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, physical inactivity or obesity. If you have diabetes, it's very important to have regular check-ups. Work closely with your healthcare provider to

manage your diabetes and reduce any other risk factors:

- Control your weight and blood cholesterol with a low-saturated-fat, low-cholesterol diet. Be physically active for at least 30 minutes on most or all days of the week.

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Also, 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. Don't smoke, and avoid other people's tobacco smoke.

- Specific medicines may help you control your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose. Your doctor will advise you if one is right for you. If you take medicine, take it exactly as directed. If you have questions about the dosage or side effects, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

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## How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or health care professional. Or call your local American Heart Association or 1-800-242-8721, or the American Stroke Association at 1-888-478-7653.

- If you have diabetes, heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.

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

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

*Can diabetes be cured?*

*What type of diet would be most helpful?*

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