

Frequently Asked Questions About Diabetes



What's the difference between type 1 and type 2 diabetes?

- Type 1 diabetes: Commonly referred to as “juvenile” diabetes because it usually develops in children and teenagers. The body’s immune system attacks the insulin-producing cells of its pancreas, decreasing the amount of insulin available to the body.
- Type 2 diabetes: Also called “adult-onset” diabetes, since it typically develops after the age of 35. However, due to increased rates of obesity, more diagnoses are occurring in younger people. People with type 2 diabetes can produce insulin but their bodies can’t use it as well (insulin resistance).

What is prediabetes?

Before people develop type 2 diabetes, they almost always have “prediabetes” — blood sugar levels that are higher than normal but not yet high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. This condition puts you at a higher risk for developing type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. You can still prevent getting type 2 diabetes by making necessary lifestyle changes.

You’re considered to have prediabetes when either:

- Your A1c test is between 5.7% and 6.4%.
- Your fasting blood glucose is between 100 and 125 mg/dl.
- Your oral glucose tolerance test is between 140 and 199 mg/dl.

What is uncontrolled diabetes?

Uncontrolled diabetes is diabetes that isn’t properly treated and managed. The result is blood sugar that is too high and remains high. Blood sugar that’s too high for too long can cause long-term health problems, such as damage to eyes or kidneys.

What are the symptoms of uncontrolled diabetes?

Diabetes often doesn’t cause symptoms in its early stages. People who think they might have diabetes must visit a physician for testing and diagnosis. They might have some or none of the following symptoms:

- Frequent urination.
- Excessive thirst.
- Unexplained weight loss.
- Extreme hunger.
- Sudden vision changes.
- Tingling or numbness in hands or feet.
- Feelings of fatigue much of the time.
- Dry skin.
- Sores that are slow to heal.
- Frequent and recurrent infections.

What’s a normal blood sugar level for someone who doesn’t have diabetes?

Here are normal readings for a person without diabetes:

- An A1C test below 5.7%.
- A fasting blood glucose test less than 100 mg/dl.
- A glucose tolerance test of 140 mg/dl or lower.

Frequently Asked Questions About Diabetes

What are blood sugar levels for people who have diabetes?

Target blood sugar levels for people with diabetes vary during the day, according to the American Diabetes Association:

- When you wake up and before meals: 80 to 130 mg/dl.
- Two hours after starting a meal: Below 180 mg/dl.

If you have diabetes, talk to your physician about whether these targets are right for you.

Why is my blood sugar high in the morning?

There can be various reasons for an early rise in glucose. It happens when your body produces a surge of hormones to help you wake up. During the day, activity tends to keep blood sugar under control if you have a healthy, active lifestyle. If you're using insulin, discuss the early rise in glucose with your physician, who may need to adjust your dosage.

What is the A1C test?

The A1C (also called HbA1c) is a blood test that shows how blood sugar levels were controlled over the previous two to three months. It should be ordered by your physician at least twice a year. The goal for most adults with diabetes is an A1C that's less than 7% and may vary by age and other risk factors.

Do I need to fast before an A1C test?

No, fasting is not required for an A1C because the test measures your average blood glucose levels over the past two to three months.

Can stress increase blood sugar levels?

Yes. Stress can elevate blood sugar. If you already require insulin when you're otherwise unstressed, you may need more at these times. Be sure to monitor yourself in all situations as closely as you can.

Does hot or cold weather affect blood sugar levels?

High heat can lead to dehydration, which in turn can cause high blood sugar. It takes six molecules of water to remove one molecule of sugar from the blood stream, so the higher the blood sugar level, the more water you need to drink. Extreme hot or cold temperatures can cause changes in the vascular system that can affect blood sugar and cause reactions.

How do you treat type 2 diabetes?

When you have type 2 diabetes, you first need to eat a healthy diet, stay physically active, and lose extra weight. If these lifestyle changes can't control your blood sugar, you also may need to take medication, including insulin.

Eating a healthy diet, being physically active, and losing extra weight is the first line of therapy. Diet and exercise are the foundation of all diabetes management because it makes your body's cells respond better to insulin (it decreases insulin resistance) and lowers blood sugar levels.

If you can't normalize or control your blood sugar with lifestyle changes, the next treatment phase is taking medicine, either by pill or by injection.

Can type 2 diabetes go away? And if my blood sugar becomes normal, do I still have diabetes?

If you have type 2 diabetes and your blood sugar is controlled during treatment (diet, exercise, and medications), it means that your treatment plan is working. You have a good blood sugar level because of the treatment, not because your diabetes has gone away. You'll need to continue your treatment, or your blood sugar will go back up.



Frequently Asked Questions About Diabetes

Will I need to take insulin if I have type 2 diabetes?

Maybe. Historically, 30% or more of people with type 2 diabetes required insulin therapy. However, there are many new medications available that may delay or prevent the need for insulin therapy. It's expected that fewer and fewer individuals will need insulin therapy to control their blood sugar.

If I have type 2 diabetes and take insulin, do I have to take it forever?

Not necessarily. If you can lose weight, change your diet, increase your activity level, and/or change your medications, you may be able to reduce or stop insulin therapy. Under certain circumstances, you may only need insulin temporarily — such as during pregnancy or acute illness, after surgery, or when treated with other medications that increase your body's resistance to insulin (such as prednisone or steroids). Insulin therapy often can be stopped after the event or stress is over.

Will exercise help my diabetes?

Exercise is very beneficial in managing type 2 diabetes. Always consult with your physician about exercise guidelines, to exercise safely and reduce risks.

Why is my blood sugar higher after exercise?

Exercise is a stressor, so blood sugar will be higher immediately after your session. Wait an hour after you exercise and see if you get the same results.

If I have type 2 diabetes, can I stop taking diabetes medications if I eliminate soda, candy, and cookies from my diet?

If you eliminate concentrated sources of carbohydrates (foods that turn into sugar in your blood stream) like candy, cookies, or sugary drinks, you may be able to reduce or eliminate the need for diabetes medications. Everyone with type 2 diabetes will benefit from an improved diet, but you may still need other interventions, such as increased physical activity, weight loss, or medications to keep your blood sugar in the target range. Check with your physician about adjusting your diabetes medications if you change your diet.

Are my children at risk?

The risk is highest when multiple family members have diabetes and the children are overweight and don't exercise.

Can type 2 diabetes be prevented?

Although you can't change your genetic risk for developing type 2 diabetes, even modest exercise, eating a healthy diet, and weight loss can delay or prevent the development of type 2 diabetes.

