

DIABETES

Diabetes mellitus refers to a group of diseases that affect how the body uses blood sugar (glucose). Glucose is an important source of energy for the cells that make up the muscles and tissues. It's also the brain's main source of fuel.

The main cause of diabetes varies by type. But no matter what type of diabetes you have, it can lead to excess sugar in the blood. Too much sugar in the blood can lead to serious health problems.

Chronic diabetes conditions include type 1 diabetes and type 2 diabetes. Potentially reversible diabetes conditions include prediabetes and gestational diabetes. Prediabetes happens when blood sugar levels are higher than normal. But the blood sugar levels aren't high enough to be called diabetes. And prediabetes can lead to diabetes unless steps are taken to prevent it. Gestational diabetes happens during pregnancy. But it may go away after the baby is born.

Symptoms

Diabetes symptoms depend on how high your blood sugar is. Some people, especially if they have prediabetes, gestational diabetes or type 2 diabetes, may not have symptoms. In type 1 diabetes, symptoms tend to come on quickly and be more severe.

Some of the symptoms of type 1 diabetes and type 2 diabetes are:

- Feeling more thirsty than usual.
- Urinating often.
- Losing weight without trying.
- Presence of ketones in the urine. Ketones are a byproduct of the breakdown of muscle and fat that happens when there's not enough available insulin.
- Feeling tired and weak.
- Feeling irritable or having other mood changes.
- Having blurry vision.

- Having slow-healing sores.
- Getting a lot of infections, such as gum, skin and vaginal infections.

Prevention

Type 1 diabetes can't be prevented. But the healthy lifestyle choices that help treat prediabetes, type 2 diabetes and gestational diabetes can also help prevent them:

- **Eat healthy foods.** Choose foods lower in fat and calories and higher in fiber. Focus on fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Eat a variety to keep from feeling bored.
- **Get more physical activity.** Try to get about 30 minutes of moderate aerobic activity on most days of the week. Or aim to get at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity a week. For example, take a brisk daily walk. If you can't fit in a long workout, break it up into smaller sessions throughout the day.
- **Lose excess pounds.** If you're overweight, losing even 7% of your body weight can lower the risk of diabetes. For example, if you weigh 200 pounds (90.7 kilograms), losing 14 pounds (6.4 kilograms) can lower the risk of diabetes.

But don't try to lose weight during pregnancy. Talk to your provider about how much weight is healthy for you to gain during pregnancy.

To keep your weight in a healthy range, work on long-term changes to your eating and exercise habits. Remember the benefits of losing weight, such as a healthier heart, more energy and higher self-esteem.

Sometimes drugs are an option. Oral diabetes drugs such as metformin (Glumetza, Fortamet, others) may lower the risk of type 2 diabetes. But healthy lifestyle choices are important. If you have prediabetes, have your blood sugar checked at least once a year to make sure you haven't developed type 2 diabetes.