

## 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 sugar 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 (higher in the indigenous 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 or you are an individual at high risk on a risk calculator\*, 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:

<b>Being:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a member of a high-risk group (African, Arab, Asian, Hispanic, Indigenous or South Asian descent, low socioeconomic status)</li> <li>• overweight (especially if you carry most of your weight around your middle)</li> </ul>
<b>Having:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a parent, brother or sister with diabetes</li> <li>• health complications that are associated with diabetes</li> <li>• given birth to a baby that weighed more than 4 kg (9 lb)</li> <li>• had gestational diabetes (diabetes during pregnancy)</li> <li>• prediabetes (impaired glucose tolerance or impaired fasting glucose)</li> <li>• high blood pressure</li> <li>• high cholesterol or other fats in the blood</li> <li>• been diagnosed with any of the following conditions:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– polycystic ovary syndrome</li> <li>– acanthosis nigricans (darkened patches of skin)</li> <li>– psychiatric disorders:                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder</li> </ul> </li> <li>– obstructive sleep apnea</li> <li>– you use glucocorticoid medication</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

\* The Canadian Diabetes Risk (CANRISK) calculator (available at <http://www.healthy Canadians.gc.ca/diseases-conditions-maladies-affections/disease-maladie/diabetes-diabete/canrisk/index-eng.php>).

## What are the signs and symptoms of diabetes?

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 sugar 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 sugar 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 sugar more effectively.

### Lifestyle Management:

Learning to reduce stress levels in day-to-day life can help people with diabetes better manage their condition.

### 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.

**Related article:** *Type 2 diabetes: the basics, Type 1 diabetes: the basics, Prediabetes, and Are you at risk*

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