

District of Columbia Department of Health

What You Need to Know About Diabetes

What is Diabetes?

- It is a disorder defined by a lack in production and/or use of insulin.
- **Insulin** is a hormone that allows cells in the body to use the sugar **glucose** for energy.
- Diabetes can lead to serious health complications including heart disease, blindness, kidney failure, and lower-extremity amputations.
- May or may not cause symptoms
- Usually results in an individual's blood glucose being above the range found in the general population.

What are the Types of Diabetes?

- **Type 1 diabetes** referred to as insulin-dependent diabetes or juvenile diabetes.
- Develops when the pancreas is unable to produce and secrete insulin. A common cause is damage to insulin-secreting cells in the pancreas caused by a one's own immune system.
- **Type 2 diabetes** is a preventable form of diabetes that occurs in 90% to 95% of the individuals diagnosed with diabetes.
- Type 2 diabetes develops as the body begins to resist the action of insulin.
- Cells lose the ability to use glucose at the body's normal level of insulin, so the body signals the pancreas to make more insulin. The pancreas tries to meet the increased demand, but gradually loses the ability to make enough insulin.
- **Gestational diabetes** is insulin resistance that develops in some pregnant women.
- Gestational diabetes management can help reduce the likelihood of infant complications.
- And women with gestational diabetes have a high risk of developing type 2 diabetes, regular testing is suggested.

What are the Complications of Diabetes

- ◆ Nervous system damage
- ◆ Heart disease
- ◆ Eye diseases that can lead to blindness
- ◆ Stroke
- ◆ Lower extremity amputation
- ◆ Kidney disease
- ◆ Dental disease, including periodontal disease

What are the Risk Factors

- Risk factors are conditions that increase the chance of a disease occurring.
- Risk factors for **type 1 diabetes** include immune, genetic, and environmental factors.
- Risk factors for **type 2 diabetes** include older age, obesity, physical inactivity, family history of diabetes, and personal history of gestational diabetes.
- One of the most important and common risk factors for type 2 diabetes is obesity. So be sure to exercise, eat properly, reduce stress and properly management your weight.

Can Type 2 Diabetes Be Prevented?

- **YES!** People with **pre-diabetes** (*when one's blood glucose levels are almost high enough to be considered diabetes*) need to make changes in their diet and increase their level of physical activity.
- Some medications can help delay the development of diabetes, but changes in diet and exercise make those medications work better.
- Moderate physical exercise of about 30 minutes on five days per week, a 5-7% reduction in body weight, and healthier eating, can all help delay or prevent the onset of type 2 diabetes

For more information, contact the
DC Department of Health at:
202-442-5925 or visit
www.doh.dc.gov/diabetes

