

Understanding Type 2 Diabetes

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition that causes blood sugar (blood glucose) levels to rise higher than normal. Hyperglycemia is the term doctors use to describe high blood sugar.

When you eat, your body breaks food down into glucose and sends it into the blood. Insulin, a hormone made in your pancreas, helps move the glucose from your blood into your blood cells as fuel for energy. Your pancreas is an organ in your abdomen (stomach).

There are three types of diabetes: type 1, type 2, and gestational diabetes (diabetes you have when you're pregnant).

What is type 2 diabetes?

In type 2 diabetes, your body has trouble using the insulin it's making. This is called insulin resistance and it causes your blood sugar to rise higher than normal. At first, your pancreas makes more insulin to make up for this. But over time, it isn't able to keep your blood sugar levels in a normal range. When blood sugar levels stay high for long periods of time, it increases your risk of other medical problems like heart attacks, kidney disease, blindness, and nerve pain.

What treatments are used for type 2 diabetes?

The goal of treatment is to help you feel good and prevent long term problems caused by diabetes. To meet these goals, your health care team will work with you to create a care plan that includes lifestyle changes and medications. Your care plan will help you reach your treatment goals. The best way to reach these goals is to:

- Have an eating plan that meets your needs and helps you reach your goals. What you eat, how much you eat, and when you eat are all important.
- Stay physically active and get regular exercise.
- Take your medications (both pills and injected medications) as prescribed by your doctor.

Needing to take medication, including insulin, to manage your type 2 diabetes does not mean you failed.

Taking medication is simply part of good diabetes management. The most important thing you can do to stay healthy with diabetes is manage your blood sugar well—and that means taking medication on schedule and making healthy lifestyle choices.

Type 2 diabetes changes over time. At first, healthy eating and physical activity may be enough to reach your targets. But most people end up needing medications, including insulin, at some point to manage their blood sugar, no matter how hard they work to reach their targets.

What causes type 2 diabetes?

Scientists do not know the exact cause of type 2 diabetes. However, developing type 2 diabetes has been linked with several risk factors. These include:

- A history of hyperglycemia (high blood sugar), such as prediabetes and/or gestational diabetes
- Are 45 or older
- Are Black, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander
- Have a parent, brother, or sister with diabetes
- Are overweight
- Are physically inactive
- Have high blood pressure or take medicine for high blood pressure
- Have low HDL cholesterol and/or high triglycerides
- Have been diagnosed with polycystic ovary syndrome

How will I know if my diabetes treatment is working?

Get an A1C blood test at least two times a year. This helps you and your health care team know how well you are managing your blood sugar levels. The A1C test is part of your “ABCs of diabetes”—an easy way to check how well your diabetes treatment is working. The ABCs of diabetes are:

A is for A1C or estimated average glucose (eAG)

Your A1C test tells you your average blood sugar for the past two to three months. Your health care provider may call this your estimated average glucose, also called your eAG. The eAG shows your A1C results in the same units (mg/dL) as the glucose meter you use at home.

B is for blood pressure

Your blood pressure numbers tell you the force of blood inside your blood vessels. When your blood pressure is high, your heart has to work harder.

C is for cholesterol

Your cholesterol numbers tell you about the amount of fats in your blood. Some kinds of cholesterol can raise your risk for heart attack and stroke.